IRENICUM:

OR,

THE IMPORTANCE OF

UNITY

IN THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONSIDERED;

AND APPLIED TOWARDS THE HEALING
OF OUR
UNHAPPY DIFFERENCES AND DIVISIONS.

Ενδυσωμεθα την ὁμονοιαν, ταπεινοφρονεντες.
Clem. Epist. ad Corinth. sect. 30.

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MDCCLXXV.

THE IMPORTANCE *of* UNITY, *&c.*

THE ſeaſonableneſs of a diſcourſe on this ſubject muſt appear at firſt ſight to every one, who pays the leaſt regard, or attention to the religious differences which prevail among us; or who is at all verſed in the controverſy about ſubſcription to the articles of the church of *England*; eſpecially when it is conſidered, that throughout the whole courſe of it, at leaſt as far as it hath come in my way to be acquainted with it, very little notice ſeems to have been taken of the great principle of *unity* on the one ſide, any more than on the other; which yet, it is humbly preſumed, ought to have

had the firſt place in the conſideration of both.

To recall the attention of all parties to this great and neceſſary point, was the ſole motive which overcame my reluctance to enter into this controverſy: Nor, indeed, could I ſcarce have prevailed with myſelf to intermeddle with it at all, had not this, and the other topicks, which I mean to dwell chiefly upon, been of a catholick and conciliating nature. Whence I wiſh to appear in the light of a moderator in this diſpute, who is deſirous of contributing his endeavours to heal our breaches, rather than to keep up the ball of contention, which hath been bandied about too much already.

Biſhop *Stillingfleet* publiſhed his *Irenicum* with the benevolent view of accommodating the differences between the church of *England*, and the Diſſenters of his time. Ambitious of following the ſteps of a prelate, who was ſo great an ornament to this church and nation, though *non paſſibus æquis*, I have taken the liberty of adopting the

the ſame title, and prefixing it to a tract, the deſign of which is of the ſame nature, however deficient it may prove in the execution, and how far ſhort ſoever it may fall of obtaining its end.

What is here offered for this purpoſe conſiſts chiefly of obſervations on the following heads:

That the church of Chriſt is founded upon *unity*—That this principle was carefully cultivated, and religiouſly maintained, by the primitive church—That an early regard was paid to it by the church of *England* at the Reformation—That not only all the other Proteſtant churches, and all the foreign divines of that age, but even the old non-conformiſts here in *England*, had a deep ſenſe of the importance of unity; ſtrongly remonſtrated againſt ſchiſm; and condemned it as a great ſin and heinous tranſgreſſion.

Subſcription to the articles of faith required by the church of *England*, in order to preſerve the unity of it, having been much controverted of late, the right,

wiſdom, and utility, of ſuch requiſition is in the next place diſcuſſed and ſtated; ſeveral queſtions, ariſing from this ſubject, are incidentally reſolved; and ſome other expedients, which have been propoſed, inſtead of ſubſcription to the *Thirty-nine articles*, as better anſwering the ſame end, are impartially weighed and conſidered.

The whole is cloſed with an earneſt exhortation to Chriſtians of all denominations amongſt us, to cultivate catholick and uniting principles, for the ſake of promoting, and *endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Firſt, I deſire it may be obſerved, that the church of Chriſt is founded upon *unity.*

This is one of the main pillars on which it reſts; and this is implied in the very deſign, nature, and tendency, of the Chriſtian religion.

Unity of deſign, and a conſiſtence and ſymmetry of parts, is neceſſary to the duration and ſtability of every conſtitution: And the Divine Founder of his church knew

knew this ſo well, that he lays it down as a certain truth, that *a houſe divided againſt itſelf cannot ſtand*.. And yet this great truth, ſo obvious in itſelf, is at preſent ſo little regarded, that we ſeem in a manner to have loſt all ſight of it. I therefore beg leave to inſiſt a little more largely on a ſubject that concerns the very eſſence of Chriſtianity.

Our bleſſed Lord died, that he might *gather together in one the children of God, that were ſcattered abroad*[a], that there might *be one fold, and one ſhepherd*[b],—that *they all might be one, as He and the Father are one, He in them, and they in him, that they might be made perfect in one*[c].

This implies the moſt abſolute, complete, and finiſhed union that can be conceived. In this his laſt and longeſt prayer to the Father, Chriſt repeats his deſire in five or ſix different expreſſions, that his diſciples might be one, and kept in one body; which ſhews how neceſſary a part

[a] John, ch. xi. 51, 52. [b] Ch. x. 16.
[c] Ch. xvii. 22, 23.

of religion he intended this ſhould be; and likewiſe intimates to us the danger he foreſaw of his followers departing from it, which made him intercede ſo earneſtly for it. And how entire and tender he meant to render this union, appears from his praying it might be ſuch as that between the Father and himſelf was.

Every inſtitution and appointment of our Lord manifeſted his intention of aſſociating his followers into *one body*. He delivered his prayer to them all in the *plural*, to ſhew that he chiefly intended they ſhould uſe it in a *body*. He appointed *baptiſm*, as the way of receiving men into this *body*; and the *euchariſt*, as a joint memorial that the *body* of his diſciples was to keep up of his death [d].

For the conſtant and perpetual maintenance of this ſpiritual connection, Chriſt hath, for his part, promiſed to be with his faithful diſciples *always, unto the end of the world* [e]; and, to encourage them to aſſo-

[d] See Biſhop *Burnett* on the Articles. Art. XXXIV.
[e] Matt. xxviii. 20.

ciate

ciate, and assemble together, for the continuance and improvement of it, in the several acts and ordinances of religious worship, and mutual good offices, which have a powerful tendency and influence in promoting love and harmony among Christians, he assures them, that where but *two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them*[f]. For the better effecting and strengthening this blessed union among Christians, he considers himself as their head, and the whole society, which he wills them to form, as his body, and members in particular, every one of them, of him, and of each other.

"The apostles frequently use the figure "of a *body* to express this union; than "which nothing can be imagined that is "more firmly knit together, and in which "all the parts do more tenderly sympa-"thize with one another[g]." And, to convince us of the perfect harmony to

[f] Matt. xviii. 20. [g] Bishop *Burnet* ib.

which Chriſt means to bring this his myſtical body the church, and in what juſt proportion and ſymmetry of parts he would have it all to be framed together, however defective of this it may be at preſent; the apoſtle *Paul* compares it to the *human body*, all the members of it acting in conjunction with, and ſubordination to, each other, contributing to the ſupport of the whole, and being ſo tempered together, that there be no ſchiſm in the one, any more than in the other; but that all *the members ſhould have the ſame care one of another*, and ſympathize with each other[h].

I beſeech you, brethren, ſaith the apoſtle, in this ſame epiſtle (for brethren we all are), *by the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, *that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing*, and profeſs the ſame doctrine, *that there be no diviſions*, ſchiſms, *nor contentions, among you: but that ye be perfectly joined*, and framed together into one entire body,

[h] 1 Cor. xii.

in

in the ſame mind, and in the ſame judgement[i], united in affection, and, as far as poſſible, in ſentiment, belief, and principle likewiſe.

Agreeably to this, he elſewhere exhorts us, *to endeavour*, with all our power, *to keep the unity of the Spirit*, this ſpiritual unity, *in the bond of peace*, from the following conſiderations:—That the church of Chriſt is in its nature but *one*, *one* in its ſeveral parts, and *one* likewiſe in the ſeveral perſons who govern and conſtitute the whole of it. *There is*, ſays he, *one body, and one ſpirit*, or ſoul, which animates it, *even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptiſm: One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*[k].

In order to promote and eſtabliſh this perfect union, Chriſt hath appointed ſeveral diſtinct orders of men in his church; for the due conduct and government of it; the inſtruction and diſcipline of its members; the keeping of them in a body;

[i] 1 Cor. i. 10, 11. [k] Eph. iv. 3—6.

and

and for the better and more orderly administration of its ſervice and worſhip in its ſeveral parts; *for the perfecting*, or knitting together, *of the ſaints*; for the work *of the miniſtry*; *for the edifying of the body of Chriſt*; *till we all meet in the unity of the faith*; or arrive at an unity of faith, and *of the knowledge*, or acknowledgement, *of the Son of God, and grow up unto a perfect man*; as if we all were but as one perſon, inſpired with one ſoul; and till we attain unto *the meaſure of* that *ſtature* which is to make up *the fullneſs of Chriſt*:—That, having obtained ſuch a firmneſs of conſtitution, we ſhall then be no longer *toſſed to and fro like children, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight and cunning craftineſs of men, according to the ſubtile method of impoſture*[1]; but, *ſincerely loving the truth, we ſhall*, by that means, grow up into a firm union *in all things with Chriſt our head, from whom the whole body, being compacted and nurtured*,

[1] Gr. προς την μεθοδειαν της πλανης, literally *the methodiſm of impoſture*; an unlucky appellation.

or cemented, *together, obtains increaſe from every connection contributing to it, according to the efficacious operation of every part, in its proportion, to the edifying of itſelf in love* [m].

In the original this is expreſſed in ſuch ſtrong and complicated terms, as ſeem deſigned to impreſs the complicated and compact nature of that union, which is inculcated by it, the more deeply upon our minds. I have attempted a tranſlation, as expreſſive as I could render it, of the ſenſe of the original; but our language wants nerves to expreſs the nervous import of it. The ſame ſentiment occurs in another epiſtle of this ſame apoſtle, in almoſt the ſame words; importing, that from Chriſt, the head, the whole body of his church, like the natural body, is nouriſhed and knit together in love, by the joints, or ſutures, and ligaments, with which he hath united and bound all its parts to each other; and by this means it

[m] Eph. iv. 12—16.

is

is enabled to thrive and proſper, and *to increaſe with the increaſe of God*[n].

A body, thus cloſely cemented together, muſt of courſe acquire the ſoundneſs and ſtability of the moſt complete body politick. Our Divine Lawgiver, therefore, advanced it into a kingdom, which, in its conſtitution, government, and laws, is framed to collect and preſerve the ſeveral members of it in all outward acts, and inward diſpoſitions, of mutual peace, fidelity, benevolence, and agreement in ſentiment, as well as affection, far ſuperior to, and in a manner diſtinct from, all the kingdoms of this world. Whence the Lord of it might juſtly ſay, his *kingdom was not of this world*,—not founded on the ſame narrow maxims of policy which the kingdoms of this world are generally built upon: And he no leſs truly verified his promiſe of building his church upon a rock.

The ſubjects of this kingdom are accordingly exhorted, and ſtrictly enjoined,

[n] Col. ii. 19.

to

to do all good offices, not only to each other, but to all mankind, even their very enemies; and to cultivate charity and good-will towards all the world; ſtill in conformity to, and in purſuance of, the ſame great principle of unity on which it is founded.

On this principle too it was, that our Lord *brake that middle wall of partition* between *Jew and Gentile* which had kept them aſunder, and *made both one, in one body, by his croſs*, having thereby *ſlain* that *enmity* which had been between them[o]. For preſerving this bleſſed union, the apoſtle *Paul*, in conjunction with the other apoſtles, as there are grounds to ſuppoſe, preſcribed rules of uniformity, and ſuppreſſed the contentions of men, by the cuſtom of the churches of God, to which he required all to conform[p]. And he ordained the ſame practice in all the churches[q]. And hence, by the way, the church of *England* is juſtified in enacting

[o] Eph. ii. 14, 15, 16. [p] 1 Cor. xi. 16.
[q] 1 Cor. iv. 17. — xiv. 33.

laws

laws of uniformity, as it follows the pattern ſet by the apoſtles in that reſpect.

From the foregoing paſſages of ſcripture, we ſee what ſtreſs it lays upon unity in the church of Chriſt, and how warmly it preſſes the preſervation of it; than which we need no better argument of its great importance and neceſſity.

Of this we ſhall be ſtill farther convinced from what the word of God ſays of diviſions in the church.

Our bleſſed Lord teaches no more than what neceſſarily reſults from the nature of things, as already obſerved:—That *every kingdom divided againſt itſelf is brought to deſolation*; and that *a city, or houſe, divided againſt itſelf, cannot ſtand*[r]. *Now I beſeech you, brethren*, ſays the apoſtle, *mark them which cauſe diviſions and offences, contrary to the doctrine* of unity *which ye have learned, and avoid them*[s]. Having been informed, that there were *contentions* among the *Corinthians*, he beſeeches them, *as they were brethren, by the name of their*

[r] Matt. xii. 25. [s] Rom. xvi. 17.

common

common Lord and maſter *Jeſus Chriſt*, that they would *all ſpeak the ſame thing*, that there might be *no diviſions*, or *ſchiſms*, as it is in the margin, *among them*. He reproves them very ſharply for ranging themſelves under different leaders, *every one ſaying, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Chriſt. Is Chriſt divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?* ſays St. *Paul* himſelf [t]. He blames them for their carnal tempers, from there being envying, and ſtrife, and diviſions, or factions, among them. And he cenſures them again upon the ſame account; and obſerves, that their ſchiſms and diviſions muſt of courſe be productive of ſects and hereſies [u]. And in the next chapter he ſhews at large, as obſerved above, how God had tempered the body of his church together, and diſpoſed the ſeveral members of it in ſuch harmony, that there ſhould be no ſchiſm or diviſion in it, any more

[t] 1 Cor. i. 10, 11, 12, 13. ch. iii. 3.
[u] 1 Cor. xi. 18.

than

than in the human body[w]; and, ſhould it by any violence be maimed and lacerated, and its ſeveral parts be torn and diſmembered from it, we all know how fatal that would be to it: And, whenever the like happens to the ſpiritual body of Chriſt, it cannot be leſs deſtructive in proportion; and every partial diviſion, that is made in it, weakens, and tends more or leſs to diſſolve the union of it, wherein its great ſtrength conſiſts. Therefore every ſpecies and degree of contention and ſeparation in the church is to be lamented, as a mark of God's diſpleaſure, drawn down for the puniſhment of the ſins of its members.

In the church of the *Iſraelites*, the dreadful deſtruction of *Corah* and his factious aſſociates is held forth as an example and warning, to all future generations, of the ſin and danger of diviſions in the divine worſhip; the Lord doing *a new thing*, by cauſing the earth to cleave aſunder, and ſwallow up this rebellious crew, at their

[w] 1 Cor. xii. 24, 25.

very

very riſe; to prevent the miſchievous effects of ſtirring up any oppoſition to a legal eſtabliſhment in his church [x].

It was *for the ſins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her prieſts,* that *the anger of the Lord divided them, and that he no more regarded them* [y]. From the whole it appears, that Chriſt hath formed his church into one bleſſed ſociety, by certain *laws of connection* and coherence; which if Chriſtians would ſubmit to be governed by, and religiouſly obſerve, would be the moſt effectual and indiſſoluble of all others whatſoever.

This is what we have good grounds to expect they will in the end be brought to, when there will be but *one fold under one ſhepherd*; of which more hereafter. And this ſociety is framed and linked together upon ſo comprehenſive a plan, that it is not confined to the bounds of this earth; which only furniſhes colonies, to be received into the far more extenſive regions, occupied by the church triumphant in

[x] Numb. xvi. throughout. [y] Lam. iv. 13. 16.

heaven; both being in communion, and having an intercourſe with each other.

Purſuant to this plan, I proceed to obſerve,

Secondly, That this great principle of unity was carefully cultivated, and religiouſly maintained, by the primitive church.

The very firſt thing that the diſciples of our Lord did after his departure from them, and his aſcenſion into heaven, was to form themſelves into a ſmall ſociety; *continuing ſtedfaſtly in the apoſtles doctrine and fellowſhip*; having ſold all their goods and poſſeſſions, and thrown them into one common ſtock, for their mutual ſupport; employed in the conſtant exerciſe of family-devotion; and at the ſame time, with one accord, daily frequenting the publick worſhip in the temple.

Their unanimity and charity gained them reſpect and admiration, and rapidly increaſed their number. *Three thouſand* ſouls were added to them in one day; which ſoon grew to *five thouſand*; and ſtill

the

the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul: Neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; for they had all things common[z]. And their love of each other was so remarkable, that it became notorious even to a proverb; and was the envy of their heathen neighbours.

The first difference that arose in the church was immediately settled by the authority of an apostolical council; which ordained some things, among others of greater consequence, to be observed by the Gentile converts, that might be looked upon as mere articles of peace; being in themselves so unessential to Christianity, that they were generally disregarded soon after the age in which they had been enjoined[a].

We have very probable grounds to believe, that, besides the holy scriptures, there was a symbol of faith delivered to the church by the apostles, and their dis-

[z] Acts iv. 32. [a] Acts xv. 20.

ciples; which was embraced, and ſtrictly adhered to, throughout the whole Chriſtian world; and that this, for ſubſtance, was much the ſame with, what is now called, the apoſtles creed. This was *that form of doctrine, which was delivered to the church*[b]; —That *form of ſound words*, which St. *Paul* charged *Timothy* to *hold faſt*; —That *good thing*, which, *by the grace of God's Spirit, he was to keep*[c]; —*The things, which he had heard of him among many witneſſes*; which he was to *commit to faithful men, who ſhould be able to teach others alſo*[d]; —*The things*, which he *had learned, and had been aſſured of, knowing of whom he had learned them*[e]; —*The firſt principles of the oracles of God, and of the doctrine of Chriſt*[f]. This, in a word, was the ſame *faith* ſtill, which was *once delivered to the ſaints*; and which they were exhorted *earneſtly to contend for*[g].

[b] Rom. vi. 17. [c] 2 Tim. i. 13, 14.
[d] 2 Tim. ii. 2. [e] Ch. iii. 14.
[f] Heb. v. 12. — vi. 1. [g] Jude 3.

All

All theſe different modes of expreſſion agree in one and the ſame import; that if there was not ſome certain ſtandard, or fixed formulary of faith, delivered by the apoſtles, and other planters of churches, to which all doctrines were to be reduced; yet that there were in all churches ſuch forms as agreed in eſſentials, and were in ſubſtance the ſame throughout. Theſe were preſerved with the greateſt regard and veneration; and were chiefly committed to the care of the reſpective biſhops, who were extremely watchful over their ſacred *depoſitum*; often meeting, and ſometimes at the peril of their lives, to conſult about the good of the church; to preſerve it, as far as they were able, in the true faith; to prevent innovations, or to remonſtrate againſt them; and at other times, ſending profeſſions of faith to each other, upon their agreement in which they held communion together. And when any, either of the clergy or laity, removed, or traveled from one dioceſe to another, they were furniſhed, by the

biſhop of the dioceſe, to which they belonged, with commendatory epiſtles, mentioned by St. *Paul*[h]; in teſtimony of love and unity, and of the ſoundneſs and orthodoxy of their faith.

Diſputes indeed, and diſſentions, aroſe in particular churches, even in the apoſtolical age; but they were not carried ſo far, as to be productive of any formal, or open ſchiſms; nor did they diſturb the peace of other churches: But there continued a general harmony and unanimity, throughout the churches of the whole world, during the three firſt centuries, not only in doctrine; but, for the moſt part, in their religious rites and obſervances likewiſe.

A difference in the obſervation of a day was reckoned ſo unhappy a thing, that apoſtolical practice and uſage, alledged on both ſides, was ſcarce thought ſufficient to juſtify the one half of the church, or the other. And the diſpute between the Eaſtern and Weſtern churches, about

[h] 2 Cor. iii. 1.

keeping

keeping *Eaſter*, was thought of ſuch importance, as to require the authority of a general council to ſettle it.

As different opinions aroſe in the church, endeavours were conſtantly uſed to adjuſt them; and, as hereſies ſprang up, councils, ſome of which were general, were ſummoned to cenſure and ſuppreſs, or to guard againſt them. To this end *Creeds* came to be framed, enlarged, and multiplied; that the body of Chriſtians might know what to believe and profeſs, and be provided with antidotes againſt falſe doctrines: All which proceeded from this general principle, namely, the neceſſity of maintaining the unity of the catholick faith, and of preſerving it whole and undefiled.

Schiſms and diviſions in the church were looked upon as of the moſt deplorable and dangerous conſequence; and thoſe that cauſed them were anathematized, and avoided, as the peſts of ſociety. St. *Cyprian* laments ſchiſm as the greateſt evil that can befal the church, and

reckons it to be a crime of ſo deep a die, as not to be expiated even by martyrdom [i]. When any diſſentions or diſputes aroſe, to diſturb the peace of the Chriſtian world, no pains were ſpared to make up the breach as ſoon as poſſible. *Dionyſius*, biſhop of *Alexandria*, writing to *Novatian*, who had made ſome diſturbance in the church of *Rome*, exhorts him to extinguiſh the ſchiſm; for that it was better to ſuffer any thing, than that the church of God ſhould be rent in pieces [k]. The ſchiſms of the *Donatiſts* and *Novatians* are very ſtriking inſtances of the ſenſe of the church in general of ſuch matters in thoſe days. And how ſeverely they branded all ſchiſm and diviſion, and how induſtriouſly they laboured to reconcile diſſenting brethren, might eaſily be ſhewn from the writers of thoſe times [l].

Each particular church had authority over its own members; and all who lived

[i] Cypr. *De Unitate Eccleſiæ.*
[k] Euſeb. *Eccl. Hiſt. lib.* vi. *cap.* 45.
[l] See Cave's *Prim. Chriſt.* p. 417.

within

within the pale of it were ſubject to its juriſdiction; to the rule of faith, and mode of worſhip which it preſcribed; and to the rites and ceremonies ordained by it: And, when doubts and differences aroſe, its authority in explaining doctrines, and deciding controverſies, was generally acknowledged, reſorted to, and acquieſced in.

When falſe doctrines had crept into one church, it was thought neceſſary for other churches, which had not been infected by them, to remonſtrate againſt them, and to declare and aſſert their own principles: And, when corruptions in principle, doctrine, and practice, became general in the church of *Rome*, and had rendered the terms of its communion ſinful, and therefore neceſſary to be departed from, which otherwiſe would have been unjuſtifiable; confeſſions of faith were ſet forth, in all the reformed churches, to declare the purity of their doctrines, in oppoſition to the errors and corruptions of that church.

This was thought neceſſary to be done, among the reſt, by the church of *England*;

land; and her authority for this purpose, though now called in question, was justified by the practice of all other churches; and was in itself absolutely indispensable, in order to testify to the world what she professed, and what she reformed from; as well as to maintain her own consistency, and *unity in the faith.*

This is what I come in the next place to speak to.

How early and careful a regard was paid to this great principle of unity at the *Reformation*, appears from the proceedings of the *Reformers* in that great work; who carried it on with all the prudence, expedition, and attention, that a matter of such importance required, and the temper of the times would admit of. In the year 1548, the second of King *Edward's* reign, a new *liturgy* was compiled; and the uniform use of it was enjoined by act of parliament; and enforced from time to time by subsequent acts of parliament, in that reign, and in the reigns of Queen *Elizabeth*, and *Charles* II. In the year 1552,

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the main doctrine of the church was ſet forth, in the articles of religion, which were *agreed upon by the biſhops, and other learned men*, for the profeſſed purpoſe *of avoiding diverſities of opinions, and eſtabliſhing conſent concerning true religion.* Thoſe articles were reviſed, and without any material alterations, were unanimouſly *agreed upon, by the Archbiſhops and Biſhops of both provinces, and the whole Clergy in convocation, in the year* 1562, *for avoiding*, as before, *diverſities of opinion, and ſtabliſhing conſent touching true religion.* And they were *put forth by the Queen's authority.*

Among other points of faith ſettled by theſe articles, they authorized the two books of *Homilies*, which contained *a godly and wholeſome doctrine neceſſary for thoſe times*; and which the clergy were required to uſe for the inſtruction of the people; whereby both the one, and the other, had ſound principles inſtilled into their minds, and were kept ſteady in them; and theſe were very ſeaſonable antidotes and preſervatives

vatives againſt the falſe doctrines of the church of *Rome* on the one hand; and againſt the wild notions of the enthuſiaſts of thoſe times on the other.

And thus wiſe proviſion was made for uniformity of worſhip, and unity of doctrine, in this church, at its firſt eſtabliſhment; in which it hath continued ever ſince. Its government and diſcipline was then ſettled likewiſe upon the ſame plan, on which it ſtands at preſent: And, upon the whole, our *Jeruſalem is built as a city, that is at unity in itſelf*[m]. She doth not boaſt of perfection, any more than other human conſtitutions. *Nevertheleſs, as far as ſhe hath already attained, ſhe walketh by the ſame rule*, according to the apoſtle's advice[n]. She hath been ever ſteady in her principles; but not ſo rigid and bigoted, as to pay no attention to improvement: For all unprejudiced perſons muſt allow, that her late divines have actually improved upon thoſe who went before them,

[m] Pſ. cxxii. 3. [n] Phil. iii. 16.

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in their explanations of ſome of her doctrines; which being of a more abſtruſe and ſpeculative nature; and being judged by many to be of leſs importance, and to be ſuch as may be held either way, without detriment to the true faith; if our divines of later times have underſtood thoſe doctrines with more latitude, and have put a more liberal conſtruction upon them, than they had before been generally underſtood in; and if all are allowed to abound in their own ſenſe of thoſe doctrines; this wrong, if it can be ſo called, may ſurely be forgiven them. The doctrines I mean, are thoſe chiefly which relate to *predeſtination and grace*. It is well known, and hath been often proved to the ſatisfaction of all unprejudiced perſons, that the church never meant in her articles, or elſewhere, to lay down any reſtrictive definition of thoſe doctrines; but was more wiſely planned upon ſuch catholick and comprehenſive principles, as the moſt moderate of all denominations might embrace; ſteering a middle courſe between

the *Lutherans* and *Calviniſts* on the one hand, and between the *Calviniſts* and the *Arminians* on the other; but never formally, or expreſsly, liſting under the banner of, or attaching herſelf to, either party. Her doctrines were ſettled before any of her divines went to *Geneva*, or elſewhere abroad. When they returned, ſhe had no reaſon either to condemn, or eſpouſe, the doctrines they preached; nor thoſe of *Arminius*, who appeared afterwards. Whatever differences aroſe with regard to thoſe doctrines, the church of *England* never fell into diviſions, nor baniſhed from her communion, much leſs perſecuted, any on account of them; as ſome foreign proteſtant churches have done; and as we daily ſee is done among ſome of our ſectaries at home.

On the contrary, though the zeal of the old *Puritans* for the doctrines of *Calvin* carried them to ſuch lengths, that they branded the moderate opinions of thoſe, who differed from them, as popiſh, or tending to popery; yet thoſe opinions grew

grew by degrees to be the general doctrines of our Engliſh divines; and that without noiſe or diſturbance; and I hope too without having given any cauſe to ſuſpect, they have ſince been, or at this time are, more popiſhly inclined than formerly.

No imputation of popery can lie againſt thoſe who hold theſe doctrines either way; becauſe, if there are ſome in the church of *Rome*, who underſtand them in the moderate ſenſe, there are others in that church, the *Moliniſts* I mean, who maintain the moſt rigid ſenſe of them; and thoſe Proteſtants, who agree with them in this reſpect, would not therefore be thought to verge towards popery. Proteſtants in general agree with papiſts in doctrines more fundamental than theſe.

I believe the *Methodiſts* alone, in whom the old *Puritans* ſeem to be revived, make the rigid ſenſe of theſe doctrines, to be, in a manner, the ſole teſt of the church of *England*, and even of Chriſtianity too. Whence they allow ſalvation to none but thoſe of their own perſuaſion.

Loud invectives have been made by others againſt our church, on account of the dark, uncertain manner, in which it leaves theſe doctrines. This the more candid would interpret into a latitude, as it was intended, wiſely calculated to comprehend perſons who differed in their judgements concerning theſe abſtruſe points, which confeſſedly do not affect the eſſence, or well-being, of Chriſtianity; while its fundamental doctrines are ſo clearly and explicitly laid down, as not to admit of any uncertainty.

There is yet another charge, which ſtrikes at the very vitals of the church of *England*, and which it is proper here to take notice of. It hath been confidently aſſerted, "That the church of *England*, "properly ſo called, is not now exiſt-"ing[o]." And, if ſo, there is an end, not only of its unity, but of its very Being. But, God be praiſed! this is no more than an aſſertion, though ſo bold a

[o] See *Confeſſional*, p. 244. 3d edit.

one,

one, that it might as well be ſaid, the ſun doth not ſhine at noon-day. The church of *England* not only exiſts, but flouriſhes likewiſe, in ſpite of all the efforts of its enemies, outward and inward, to deſtroy it: And, we truſt, *the gates of hell will never prevail againſt it.*

If the author of this aſſertion knows thoſe who profeſs themſelves of the church of *England*, but who have departed from her doctrines, and have eſpouſed tenets diametrically oppoſite to them; he doth not ſurely mean to call this the ſenſe of the church of *England*; nor to denominate this church from ſuch apoſtate members of it.

I proceed, *Thirdly*, to obſerve, that not only all the other proteſtant churches, and divines, at and after the Reformation; but even the old Non-conformiſts here in *England*, had a deep ſenſe of the importance of unity; ſtrongly remonſtrated againſt ſchiſm, and condemned it, as a great ſin, and heinous tranſgreſſion.

We have ſeen what the ſenſe of the primitive church was in this reſpect. If we come down to later times, we ſhall find, that the moſt eminent and learned foreign divines, ſince the Reformation, who can leaſt be ſuſpected of partiality to this church, were of the ſame ſentiments.

No one will object to *Calvin's* teſtimony, which is very remarkable to this purpoſe. "God," ſays he, "ſets ſuch a value upon "the communion of his church, that he "looks upon him, as an apoſtate from his "religion, who wilfully ſeparates from, "and breaks the unity of, any chriſtian "ſociety, which hath the true miniſtry "of the word and ſacraments." And farther he ſaith, "that ſeparation from "ſuch a church is a denial of God and "Chriſt; a deſtruction of his truth; "and a ſacrilegious and perfidious breach "of the marriage between Chriſt and his "ſpouſe [p]." And he enlarges on the ſubject.

With regard to the church of *England*; *Beza*, and *Bullinger*, and all the learned in

[p] Inſtit. lib. iv. cap. i. ſect. 10.

Europe,

Europe, condemned the ſeparation from it; and its communion was owned by all the proteſtant, and reformed churches abroad. The firſt *Puritans* at home, ſome of whom were fierce and contentious enough, did not yet chuſe to leave the church: But *Sampſon*, and *Humphreys*, and *Fox*, and ſeveral others of the moſt learned and reſpectable among them, lived and died in its communion; and were ſuffered to preach, and to enjoy their preferments, to the number of *five hundred*, though they did not conform to it[q]. Even *Cartwright* himſelf declared on his death-bed, "That "he ſeriouſly lamented the unneceſſary "troubles he had cauſed in the church, by "the ſchiſm he had been the great fomenter "of: And wiſhed he was to begin his life "again, that he might teſtify to the "world the diſlike he had to his former "ways[r]."

[q] Biſhop *Maddox's* Anſwer to *Neale*, p. 140. *et ſeqq.*

[r] *Strype's* Life of Archbiſhop *Whitgift*, book iv. ch. 28.

The firſt form of diſcipline, that was ſet up by the *Non-conformiſts*, imported, that it was conſiſtent with the peace of the church [s]. And many miniſters, who ſcrupled ſubſcription, declared that its doctrine, and diſcipline, and worſhip, were ſound, godly, and edifying; and contained nothing in them to juſtify ſeparation, and make a breach in the unity of the church: Nor were there any, who remonſtrated more ſtrongly, or in ſeverer terms, againſt the ſin and miſchief of the ſchiſm that was then made, than ſome of the *Non-conformiſts* themſelves. Though they feared to ſubſcribe, yet they would not ſeparate; and they even wrote againſt thoſe of the ſeparation, and that with ſuch zeal, that Mr. *Hilderſham*, a celebrated writer among them, was called, *The maul of the Browniſts* [t]. It may be too galling, to repeat the expreſſions of many of them. It is ſufficient to obſerve in general, that in

[s] *Fuller's* Ch. Hiſt. book ix. p. 140.

[t] Archbiſhop *Tenniſon's* Argument for Union, in London Caſes, p. 474.

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the graveſt, and beſt-tempered confutation of the *Separatiſts*, which was made in the name of the *Non-conformiſts*, it is ſaid, that they incurred the moſt ſhameful and odious reproach of manifeſt ſchiſm. And farther, ſay they, "We hold them all to "be in a dangerous ſtate; we are loath to "ſay in a damnable ſtate, as long as they "continue in this ſchiſm [u]."

Even the *Separatiſts* themſelves allowed the doctrine of our church to be ſound; and that ſeparation from it was not juſtifiable for all the blemiſhes, imperfections, and corruptions, which they alledged it laboured under.

The *Non-conformiſts*, on the other hand, maintained, that nothing could juſtify ſeparation from the church, but ſuch corruptions as overthrew the being, or conſtitution of it: And that granting there were many and great corruptions in it, they were not ſuch as did overthrow its conſtitution: And they made uſe of ſeveral

[u] Biſhop *Stillingfleet's* Unreaſonableneſs of Separation, p. 30.

arguments to prove, that the church of *England* was a true church of Chriſt; and ſuch a one, as from which, whoſoever wittingly, and continually ſeparateth himſelf, cutteth himſelf off from Chriſt[w].

In the diſputes between the *preſbyterian* divines and the *Independents*, they mutually charged each other with ſchiſm; into which the *aſſembly of divines* reſolved the departure of the diſſenting brethren from their rule of church-government; and their ſetting up of ſeparate congregations: The *Independents*, on the contrary, alledging, that the great cauſe of ſchiſm had been that ſtrict obligation of all to uniformity; which the *aſſembly of divines* had enjoined; and which they complained was exerciſing tyranny over men's conſciences[x]. And yet at a meeting of diſſenting preachers, held in the year 1663, about the lawfulneſs of communicating with the church of *England*, one of them

[w] *Stillingfleet*, ib. p. 36.

[x] *Stillingfleet's* Sermon on *Phil.* iii. 16. p. 34.

relates,

relates, that he had brought in *twenty* reaſons, to prove the lawfulneſs of it: And no one of the brethren, as he adds, ſeemed to diſſent, but to take the reaſons to be valid[y].

But farther: Such was the ſenſe that the reſpective parties, who engaged in *the ſolemn league and covenant*, had of the importance of unity in the church, that the chief deſign of it was to unite the three kingdoms of *England*, *Scotland*, and *Ireland*, in doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, and government. Accordingly they ſtipulated, that they would endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to the neareſt conjunction and uniformity in religion; confeſſing of faith; form of church-government; and directory for worſhip and catechiſing—that they might live in faith and love—remain conjoined in a firm peace and union to all poſterity—and not ſuffer themſelves to be divided, or withdrawn from, this bleſſed union and conjunction——but conſtantly continue

[y] *Ib.* p. 21.

therein againſt all oppoſition; and promote the ſame againſt all lets and impediments whatſoever. And the obſervation of this league and covenant they engaged to enforce by all the means in their power. And they were moſt certainly right in the general principle, which they went upon.

Mr. *Hales* is well known to have treated ſchiſm as lightly as moſt men; and his tract on that ſubject was eagerly caught up, as ſoon as it appeared; and much ſtreſs hath been laid upon his authority ever ſince. And yet in that very tract he ſaith, "That communion is the very ſtrength "and ground of all ſociety; and ſchiſm is "eccleſiaſtical ſedition—and that to break "the knot of union is a crime hardly "pardonable." No enemy to the authors of ſchiſm can place this ſin in a worſe light, than their friends have done.

Biſhop *Burnet's* moderation, as a divine, is acknowledged by all; and yet he treats ſchiſm as a very grievous ſin. He reckons it, both in its nature and conſequences, to

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be one of the greateſt of ſins; which diſſolves chriſtian union; diſlocates the members of Chriſt's body; creates needleſs diſturbances in the church; gives occaſion to all that alienation of mind, all thoſe raſh cenſures, and unjuſt judgements, which do ariſe from ſuch diviſions; which gives ſcandal to the weak; and which nothing can juſtify, but the impoſing of unlawful terms of communion[z]. But this, if it ever hath been laid to the charge of the church of *England*, yet never hath been, nor ever can be, proved againſt it. The old diſſenters were ready to ſubſcribe all our doctrinal articles, and profeſſed greater zeal for many of them, than they allowed ſome of our own divines did. Alas! how are theſe people fallen from their firſt love! Were any of their fore-fathers now living, with what vehemence and indignation would they upbraid their ſons for their degeneracy, in refuſing to ſubſcribe

[z] Biſhop *Burnet* on Article XXXIV. Of the ſinfulneſs and miſchief of ſchiſm more at large, ſee *Dodwell* on ſchiſm.

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any of them? They themſelves acknowledge, that their religious ſentiments are greatly changed from what they were formerly. I wiſh they could ſay, they are changed for the better. All true ſons of the church of *England* muſt conclude, that the change is for the worſe: And God forbid, that ſuch corruptions in the fundamental doctrines of Chriſtianity, and ſuch defections from the faith, as are ſo notorious among us, ſhould be countenanced by law; the ſanction of which was never obtained for principles of this kind in any chriſtian country: Much leſs I hope will it be granted, in any degree, to principles ſo different from, I might ſay, ſo oppoſite to, thoſe of the church by law eſtabliſhed.

Our church ſtill perſeveres in the ſame plan of unity in ſound doctrine, and uniformity of pure worſhip, as ſhe was at firſt eſtabliſhed upon; agreeably to the nature and genius of the goſpel.

By purſuing this plan, ſhe not only endeavours to preſerve her own members from diſſolving the bond of this union; but ſhe farther

farther extends her care to thoſe that have ſeparated from her; in order to prevent that ſeparation from becoming total. They at preſent profeſs to agree with her in doctrine; and ſhe wiſhes to preſerve that agreement, being loath to part with them entirely. It is true, the ligament is but ſlender: But, while it laſts, it is poſſible it may gain ſtrength in time. But, if it be cut off, we may then bid farewel to all hopes of a reconciliation. And, if that prove to be the caſe, the guilt will not fall upon her. Let them look to it, who force themſelves from her embraces. If ſhe were to conſult her own ſeparate intereſt only, ſhe would connive at—ſhe would encourage the Diſſenters petition for exemption from ſubſcribing her articles: And, if they underſtood the intereſt of their own body, they would not deſire it; as every ſect of them would dwindle, and fall into decay, the faſter for it.

This they may be aſſured of, from the experience of former ages, and from the obſervation of thoſe, whoſe opinions they can have no objection to. It was the remark

of *Socrates*, the eccleſiaſtical hiſtorian, on occaſion of the ſchiſms of the *Arians*, *Novatians*, and others; that, when a breach is once made in the church, it ſeldom reſts there: But thoſe who made it begin a freſh quarrel with each other, and upon very ſlight pretences become divided among themſelves[a].

This hath been confirmed in all ages; and they may ſee abundant proofs of it in the preſent. It was then confirmed in fact, when the *Novatians*, and *Donatiſts*, ſubdivided themſelves; and cut themſelves, as well as the whole church, *minutatim*, and *fruſtum de fruſto*, as St. *Auſtin* complains[b]. For a judicious hiſtorian obſerves, "That as the *Novatians* ſeparated "from the antient orthodox church; ſo "did the ſect of the *Quarto-decimani*, from

[a] Ἡ γαρ εκκλησια διαιρεθεισα, επι τη ἁπαξ γενομενη διαιρεσει ουχ ἱσταλο· αλλα γραφεντες καθ' ἑαυτων παλιν ἐχωρεν· και μικρας, και ευλελους προφασεως λαβομενοι, αλληλων διεχωριζοντο. Socr. Hiſt. Eccleſ. lib. v. c. 20. Vide etiam c. 21. 23, 24.

[b] Per tot diviſiones ſeipſos minutatim — conciderunt. *Aug.* contra *Parm.* lib. ii. cap. 18. Præcidens de fruſto fruſtum, et non ſe dolens ab integritate præciſum. *Aug.* enarr. in Pſ. xxxvi. 2.

" the *Novatians:* And the *Donatiſts* were " ſubdivided into the *Rogatiſts*, *Maximini-* " *aniſts*, *Parmenianiſts*, *Cirrenſes*, *Circum-* " *celliones*, and many other ſects. And the " ſame thing," ſays he, " have we ſeen " to happen in our own time. The *Lu-* " *therans*, after having ſeparated from the " reſt of the proteſtant churches, were " immediately ſplit into *Flaccians*, *Oſian-* " *drians*, and the like. We ſee," as he farther obſerves, " the Engliſh *Puritans* " are ſeparating from the church, and " from one another every day. But, above " all, the *Anabaptiſts* are remarkable on " this account; who have ſo many ſects " ſwarming among them, that ſcarce any " can reckon their number, or names[c]."

When the church of *England* had been ſuppreſſed by the parliament; and the preſbyterian diſcipline, ſo highly applauded, and ſo long and earneſtly contended for, was ſet up in its ſtead; it likewiſe, in its turn, ſoon experienced diſſenters from itſelf, as the church of *England* had done

[c] *Brandt's* Hiſtory of the Reformation, vol. II. book xxiv. p. 228.

before. Who though at firſt but inconſiderable in number, yet in a few years grew, and multiplied ſo faſt, ſtill dividing as they increaſed, that "they brake into "fractions of fractions;" and ſuch ſwarms of ſectaries of all ſorts appeared, as were never known in this nation, either before, or ſince. "Inſomuch that the miniſters "of the province of *London* expreſſed the "ſtate of things, in the year 1647, in this "manner: *Inſtead of unity and uniformity "in matters of religion, we are torn in pieces "with diſtractions, ſchiſms, ſeparations, di-"viſions, and ſubdiviſions*[d]."

The firſt fruits of the toleration, which appeared among the diſſenters, were their quarrels and diſputes with each other, on points of ſmall importance[e].

The *Methodiſts*, we all know, had ſcarce appeared, before they began to be divided under their reſpective leaders; and they continue to be more and more divided ſtill. And the *Independents* ſet up on the principle of diviſion, diametrically oppoſite

[d] See archbiſhop *Teniſon's* Argument for Union, in London Caſes, p. 462.

[e] See *Calamy's* Life of *Baxter*, *Anno* 1689, *et ſeqq.*

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to that of the goſpel. For, in the congregational way, every congregation is a complete and ſeparate church; and there may be as many religions as churches. But as they, and the diſſenters in general, are better acquainted with their own hiſtory, and conſtitutions, than I am able to inform them; I need only appeal to themſelves for the truth of what is here advanced, and the conſequences of it. They themſelves feel, and complain, that their intereſt, upon the whole, is on the decline; which cannot more juſtly be attributed to any one cauſe, nor to any one more natural, than to their own differences.

The weakneſs of the *independent* government, and its inſufficiency to ſupport itſelf, was experienced in *New-England*, as by others, ſo particularly by Mr. *Roger Williams*; who went on refining, and proceeded in his ſeparation from the church of *Salem*, of which he had been preacher, ſo far, as at laſt to diſſolve his ſociety; declaring, that every one ſhould have liberty to worſhip God according to the light of his own conſcience[s].

[s] *Stillingfleet*, Unreaſonab. of Separation, p. 113. 293.

That this kind of church government ſubſiſts at all, much leſs flouriſhes, there, or elſewhere, cannot be owing to its own conſtitution, *as ſuch*; which is ſo ill calculated for that of a national church[f].

No

[f] This ſuggeſts the following remarks on the ſtate of the church of *England*, in *America*.

Firſt, It is well known, that the church of *England* in that country hath many difficulties to ſtruggle with: Notwithſtanding it is obſervable, that, like the primitive church, ſhe thrives under her preſſures, having been generally gaining ground there, among all the other denominations of Chriſtians, with which ſhe is intermixt. A moſt manifeſt proof of the ſuperior excellence of her conſtitution!

But, Secondly, Her preſent ſituation is very critical, as her clergy have for ſome time been under a ſtate of perſecution in ſome of the colonies, who have thought fit to revenge their quarrels with the mother-country upon them; which ſhews what ſpirit they are of. This renders the caſe of the former truly deplorable; but yet, we truſt, not quite deſperate. For,

Thirdly, As the Divine Providence often brings good out of evil, they will have a comfortable proſpect of deliverance, by the interpoſition of government; when it is to be hoped the preſent diſturbances will end in peace; and the reſpective rights of the mother-country, and her colonies, will be thoroughly ſettled. And all other grievances being removed, we may humbly hope likewiſe, that the diſtreſſed church of *England* will not be overlooked: But that ſhe will be pl. ced

No one remonſtrated more, nor more ſtrongly, nor indeed wrote better, againſt the great miſchief of diviſions and ſeparations, than Mr. *Richard Baxter*; the fatal effects of which he foretels in theſe words. "Separation," ſays he, "will ruin the ſe-"parated churches themſelves at laſt. It "will admit of no conſiſtency. Parties "will ariſe in the ſeparated churches, and "ſeparate again from them, till they are

upon an equal footing with all other proteſtant churches; and be allowed the common privilege, which none other is deprived of, the ordaining of her own miniſters. For which purpoſe it is neceſſary ſhe ſhould have an eſtabliſhment of biſhops, inveſted with proper authority over their own clergy; which is all that is deſired; and without any ſecular power whatſoever. This grant, ſo juſt and reaſonable in itſelf, and which hath ſo long been ſolicited for, would at this time be a ſeaſonable relief and recompence to the poor clergy, for their ſufferings in the cauſe of government: Who, as by principle they are, and, in theſe trying times, have approved themſelves to be, well affected to our government, in the ſtate, as well as the church; this would give them more conſequence, and better enable them to preſerve peace, and promote loyalty in the colonies hereafter. The hands of government would likewiſe be ſtrengthened, by their mutual ſupport, and by the conſequent increaſe of ſo conſiderable a body of their beſt friends.

" diſſolved [g]." " Men may chuſe one paſtor " to-day, and another to-morrow, and ſo " turn round, till they are giddy, and run " themſelves out of breath—till they " ſit down, and reſt in irreligion and " atheiſm [h]." Would God, this obſervation were not too truly verified in our days!

In this view, it is a queſtion, Whether the toleration, in effect, hath proved of all that benefit to the diſſenters, which was expected; as probably it was a means of weakening the diſſenting intereſt, which ſeems to have been rather on the decline ever ſince: And therefore, if it were extended farther, I do not apprehend this indulgence would be detrimental to the church, any otherwiſe, than as it would hurt religion in general, among all ſorts and denominations of chriſtians; and bring on a greater relaxation of religious principle, which is growing upon us too faſt already. Diviſion, it is true, weakens the main body; but, as long as the ſeveral parts are

[g] Unreaſonableneſs of Separation, *ib.* p. 113.
[h] *Ib.* p. 203.

divided

divided from each other, they weaken themſelves more: And our common Chriſtianity ſuffers between them.

But the church of *England* hath found out the ſecret of defeating the ill effects of the diviſions made from it, in a great meaſure. Charity is political wiſdom. The moderation of government in church and ſtate, and its forbearance in putting the laws in execution, which ſtill remain in force againſt the diſſenters, hath in a manner diſarmed them. And there is beſides, by a kind diſpoſition of Providence, a ſtrong tendency in every wound made, in the political, as well as natural body, to cloſe and heal itſelf; whereby it contributes to repair the damage it hath done.

I have been led into theſe reflections on our diviſions, and their conſequences, taken in a political view. I cannot quit this ſubject without conſidering them in their religious nature, and conſequences likewiſe.

Schiſm, as we have ſeen, and as it always hath been underſtood, is ſo odious in

its nature, and ſo invidious in its application, that the charge and imputation of it hath of late been laid aſide; and the very term itſelf in a manner quite dropt; out of politeneſs, I preſume, towards thoſe who might be thought liable to it: And the act of toleration, having given the diſſenters a kind of eſtabliſhment, may have induced them, and others to think that charge not to be now applicable to them: And hence they have come to think our religious differences, and diverſities of opinion, to have little or no harm in them; inſomuch that a very conſiderable body of proteſtant diſſenters, who would be thought to make a majority of the whole, ſeem to queſtion, whether there be any evil in them or not. "If diverſities of opinion be an evil"—ſay they, in the Caſe of proteſtant diſſenting miniſters, and ſchool-maſters, addreſſed to parliament in the year 1773.

I ſhould be glad to draw a veil over a matter of this delicacy, and be extremely ſorry to rip up any old ſores unneceſſarily. But the ſkinning them over too ſoon, before

before they are throughly healed, is a falſe tenderneſs, and a flattering of the complaint, inſtead of removing it. It is better to ſearch, and probe the wound to the bottom; to deal honeſtly, though harſhly, where the caſe requires ſuch treatment; and to call things by their right names, though they ſhould not be the moſt pleaſant to the ear.

Neither time, nor preſcription, nor the opinions of men, can alter the nature of things; nor is an evil, grown into inveterate habit, to be looked upon as cured. What was ſchiſm two hundred years ago, is ſchiſm ſtill. We have ſeen what a grievous ſin this is, in the ſcripture account; and in the eſtimatiou of all former ages. No favourable views, in which of late it hath been repreſented, can render it in the leaſt more innocent at preſent. The *toleration* can have no efficacy for the overcoming of its malignancy. Indeed, the very term itſelf ſuppoſes its continuance as a *grievance* at leaſt; and every grievance, as ſuch, is an evil.

And as a *grievance*, it is *tolerated*; ſince it neither can, nor ought, conſiſtently with the laws of the goſpel, any more than with the laws of the land, to be removed.

I do not undertake to charge any of our proteſtant diſſenting brethren with the formal guilt of this ſin: But it becomes them very ſeriouſly to conſider themſelves, how far any of them are chargeable with it. *To their own maſter they ſtand, or fall.* This I am confident of, that the church of *England* is very ſafe from having given any juſt cauſe for our diviſions. She hath never driven any from her; and the diſſenters themſelves have acknowledged the lawfulneſs of her communion, by their conforming occaſionally to it. She may therefore waſh her hands from any guilt in this reſpect.

Great allowances are undoubtedly to be made for thoſe who have been born, and brought up, in other communions, even ſuppoſing them to be ſchiſmatical, being ſincere and well-meaning Chriſtians; as I hope, and believe, they in general are; and withal

withal *zealous of the traditions of their fathers.* Notwithſtanding, the ſin itſelf is, in its own nature, ſtill the ſame. But there are others, of whom we cannot think ſo favourably. Many, too many, I fear, there are, who, not content to tread in the footſteps of their fore-fathers, have *diſſented* even from them, as well as from the church; and that in ſome of the moſt eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity; which greatly aggravates the guilt of their ſchiſm. And there are others ſtill, ſome of whom are gone out from among ourſelves, *wandering ſtars*, who *deſpiſe dominion, ſpeak evil of dignities, and ſeparate themſelves*; and become authors and abettors of new ſects; as if we were not ſufficiently divided already. Theſe all think themſelves fully juſtified, by taking ſhelter under the act of toleration. But that is no protection to them from the laws of God, though it is from the law of the land. We can only leave them, and their followers, to the mercy of God, and their own reflections; and to the feelings of their own conſciences;

which it is to be hoped will diſpoſe them to think more ſoberly of themſelves, and to return to Chriſt's flock, from which they have ſtrayed.

As it hath been ſhewn, that the firſt care of the church of *England* was to eſtabliſh unity of doctrine, and uniformity of worſhip in itſelf, ſo eſſential to its conſtitution; I come now,

Fourthly, To conſider the right, wiſdom, and utility, of requiring ſubſcription to its articles of faith and religion, in order to this end.

It hath been already obſerved, that it was the practice of all the reformed churches, at their firſt eſtabliſhment, to draw up and ſettle ſome certain confeſſions of faith, as the ſtandard of the doctrines they profeſſed, in oppoſition to the errors of the church of *Rome*; and as a teſtimony to the world of the ſoundneſs of their own principles; which they required their own members, either explicitly, or tacitly, to give their aſſent to; and which they likewiſe ſolicited, and generally

generally obtained, from other reformed churches.

And from this general practice, the church of *England* was countenanced, and ſufficiently juſtified, in doing the ſame. Nay, this put her under an unavoidable neceſſity of conforming to all the other churches of the Reformation in this reſpect. For, had ſhe omitted to follow their example, it would not be known how far ſhe meant to carry the Reformation. Her own members would not have known, what particular doctrines ſhe maintained; nor what erroneous opinions, or corrupt practices, ſhe rejected, and proteſted againſt. And, had ſhe ſhewn any backwardneſs in this reſpect, there would have been juſt cauſe to ſuſpect her inclination to reform at all—that ſhe halted between two opinions, and had ſtill a ſecret hankering after the church of *Rome*.

That ſome proviſion of this kind was uſeful and wiſe, at the critical juncture in which it was made; in order to reſtore the

the faith to its original purity, and to purge it from the defilements which it had contracted; and was expedient, and even neceſſary to be continued, in the trying times which have ſucceeded, to preſerve it in the ſame pure and ſound ſtate which it had been reſtored to; any thinking perſon will ſoon be convinced, who conſiders, the importance of the Reformation; the difficulties which the firſt reformers had to encounter; and the dangers with which this church hath ever ſince been ſurrounded: And it is owing to the diſtance of time; and thoſe difficulties having been ſurmounted; and to the dangers being not ſo apparent; that many in theſe days do not apprehend the neceſſity of continuing the meaſures that have been taken; which, if they were to enter more deeply into them, they would find to be perhaps no leſs uſeful and neceſſary ſtill; if not more ſo, from new dangers and difficulties, ariſing from the quarters of infidelity, as well as from popery itſelf. The more, and the greater our dangers are; the more,

in

in common prudence, we ſhould be upon our guard; and the more collected in ourſelves, to withſtand them. The more dangerous and numerous the enemies of the croſs of Chriſt are; the more we ſhould hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith; and the more we ſhould be united in it.

It hath been already obſerved, that the chief proviſion which our church hath made, for preſerving an unity of faith and doctrine, is that of the *Thirty-nine articles of religion*; the profeſſed deſign of which is, as before obſerved from the import of their title, *for the avoiding of diverſities of opinion, and for the ſtabliſhing of conſent concerning true religion.* And they are of excellent uſe for this purpoſe, as in fact they prove to have been. Even with reſpect to inert matter, the firmneſs of it conſiſts in the coheſion of its parts; and in two material bodies, the more points of contact in which they meet, the more they adhere to each other.

Now,

Now, the articles of the church of *England* may be conſidered as ſo many points of contact, in which its members unite, and adhere to each other; and the whole body is kept together in its original ſtate; and hath, without any conſiderable alteration, been preſerved in that ſtate ever ſince the Reformation.

The author of the *Confeſſional* owns it to be "a fact, in which our hiſtorical writers "of all parties agree, that, during the "reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, and ſome part "of the reign of King *James* I. there was "no difference between the epiſcopal "churchmen and the *Puritans* in matters "of doctrine[i]." And again, ſays he, "The doctrinal articles were ſubſcribed "by all parties, without reſerve; becauſe "the opinions of all parties were tolerably "uniform, with reſpect to the ſubject "matter of them[k]."

He might have purſued this branch of hiſtory farther; and found, that this uniformity was continued till the church

[i] *Confeſſional*, p. 270. [k] *Ib.* p. 281.

itſelf,

itſelf, together with ſubſcription to its articles, and all its other ordinances, was ſuppreſſed under the Commonwealth; and the preſbyterian and independent diſcipline was ſubſtituted in its ſtead—That ſubſcription to the articles in general was revived at the reſtoration of the government in church and ſtate—That on the toleration it was enacted by law, that the doctrinal articles were ſtill to be ſubſcribed—and that accordingly they have been ſubſcribed, or have been ſuppoſed to be ſubſcribed, by all of whom ſubſcription is required, to this very day. Whence it appears, there was ſtill little or no difference between the epiſcopal churchmen, and the diſſenters in matters of doctrine—and that the opinions of all parties were all along tolerably uniform, with reſpect to the ſubject-matter of the articles. And they have thus proved an effectual means of *preventing diverſities of opinion, and eſtabliſhing conſent concerning true religion:* And that muſt be deemed the general conſent of this church and nation, as long as they

they continue to be ſubſcribed; whatever may be inſinuated, or pleaded to the contrary, from the diverſities of opinion entertained by particular perſons, often in contradiction to their own ſubſcriptions; which cannot in juſtice be laid to the account of the church. And upon theſe grounds, and in this ſenſe, thoſe divines might juſtly aſſert this conſtant agreement of doctrine, who are ridiculed on this account in the *Confeſſional*[1].

As ſubſcription to the articles hath been an effectual means of preſerving the doctrines of the church in general; ſo hath it been particularly ſerviceable in keeping the church of *England* free from the falſe doctrines and corruptions of popery.

But, as biſhop *Burnet* obſerves, "That "many had complied with every altera- "tion, both in King *Henry's*, and King "*Edward's* reign; who not only declared "themſelves to have been all the while "papiſts; but became bloody perſecutors,

[1] P. 153. 156. See *ib.* p. 322. Note.

"in

"in Queen *Mary's* days[m];" the author of the *Confeſſional* hence infers, "that the re-"quiring of ſubſcription to articles of re-"ligion was an ineffectual meaſure for "excluding all from the miniſtry, who "had any tincture of popery." And this, he ſays, "the good biſhop here con-"feſſes;" though the biſhop ſays no ſuch thing. And upon theſe grounds he condemns Queen *Elizabeth's* biſhops; and all ſucceeding impoſers of ſubſcription, for continuing ſuch an ineffectual teſt[n].

But hath it proved ſo ineffectual in fact, upon the whole, or in any period after the above-mentioned?

That many ſhould give way to the times at the beginning of the Reformation, when its principles were not fully ſettled; and ſhould prevaricate, and comply with every alteration that was made; and ſhould afterwards throw off the maſk, when they ſaw the church of *Rome*, in which they had been bred, and had ſo

[m] Introduction to Expoſition of Articles, p. 4.
[n] Confeſſional, *ib.*

lately

lately left, again become predominant; is not at all to be wondered at. It is not ſaid, that any of theſe were of the clergy, or had ſubſcribed to the articles of religion; and ſuppoſing, as is probable, there were ſome of them among thoſe falſe brethren, yet it is not fair to make an eſtimate of the efficacy of any means, from ſuch partial and uncertain proofs, and ſuch unſettled times, which did not admit of a fair trial of them. Let this writer carry his enquiries down to the times which ſucceeded the eſtabliſhment of the Reformation under Queen *Elizabeth*; and he will not find *many*, if any, among the clergy of the church of *England*, from thoſe times to the preſent, who ſubſcribed to the articles of religion, and were afterwards detected to have been papiſts; or, as he puts the caſe, even *to have had any tincture of popery* in them.

Some few inſtances, I allow there have been in former times, of apoſtates among the clergy, from the church of *England* to that of *Rome*; but none that I can recollect

recollect of diſguiſed papiſts continuing to officiate, or to hold preferments in it; much leſs in any ſuch numbers, as to juſtify the above-mentioned inference; that ſubſcription to the articles is an ineffectual meaſure for excluding papiſts from the miniſtry. If this writer knew of any ſuch, I preſume he would not have failed to produce them.

We may therefore appeal to the annals of our church, and to the facts contained in them, which are always the moſt deciſive proofs; and they will authorize us to conclude, That ſubſcription to the articles of religion hath been a moſt effectual means of keeping papiſts out of the miniſtry of our church. For to what other cauſe can this be ſo juſtly aſcribed, as to the many *fences* which are raiſed againſt the fundamental errors and corruptions of popery, in our articles, and in our liturgy? The former are ſo cautiouſly, ſo clearly, and ſo ſtrongly worded, that papiſts, and even *Jeſuits*, with all their ſophiſtry and equivocation, have not been

able to break through, or ſurmount them. And our excellent liturgy is framed in a manner ſo diametrically oppoſite to the idolatrous worſhip of the church of *Rome*, that almoſt every office and prayer of it would flaſh conviction in the face of any prieſt of that church, who ſhould have the hardineſs to uſe it.

Inſtances there have been, in abundance, of popiſh prieſts and *Jeſuits*, appearing under the diſguiſe of *Quakers*, *Independents*, and other ſectaries; becauſe none of thoſe ſects had any ſpecial proviſions againſt them°. But though the emiſſaries of *Rome* have appeared in all ſhapes to foment our differences; yet I do not know of their having ever been found to perſonate the clergy of the church of *England*,

° *Quakeriſm* is ſaid to have been hatcht at *Rome*. The ſect of the *Seekers* hath been traced to the ſame origin; and both are ſuppoſed to have been actuated from thence; popiſh factors having been found to mix themſelves in great numbers with thoſe, and other ſectaries; preaching in their aſſemblies; plotting the death of King *Charles* the Firſt; and diſſeminating the moſt infernal politicks among them. For this ſee *Calamy's* Life of *Baxter*, vol. I. p. 57—60. 100, 101, 102.

either

either in, or out of it; unleſs it be in one inſtance; and whether that makes more for, or againſt, the purport of what is here advanced, let the reader judge.

The inſtance I mean is that of *Faithful Cummin*; whoſe ſtory ought not to paſs here unnoticed. This man appeared in the year 1566, under the diſguiſe of a *diſſenting preacher*. He would exerciſe extemporary prayer for two hours together; groaning and weeping, in a congregation he had gathered of *men of tender conſciences*, as he called them. He pretended to the ſpirit, and to make the church purer than it was. He preached againſt ſet forms of prayer; called the *Engliſh* liturgy the *Engliſh maſs*; and had perſuaded ſeveral to pray ſpiritually, and *ex tempore*. And, what ſeemed in a manner peculiar to him, he, by ſome means or other, would get into the church, and preach againſt *Rome* and the *Pope*; but took care never to appear till divine ſervice was over; nor to join either in the *Engliſh* liturgy, or in receiving the ſacrament, in the church of *England*. Being detected,

he proved to be a *Dominican fryar*; and ſaid he had been ordained by *cardinal Pole*. Having fled from *England*, and gone to *Rome*, he was impriſoned by the *Pope*, *Pius* V, for railing at him, and his church, in *England*. But he convinced his Holineſs of his having, under that colour, done him, and mother-church, ſo much ſervice; by the *odium* which he had caſt upon the church of *England*, and the ſtumbling-block which he had laid in its way, that the *Pope* rewarded him with a preſent of two thouſand ducats [p].

To proceed. Upon the whole of what hath been ſaid, I do not ſee what objection any good proteſtant, or any one, but a downright papiſt, can poſſibly have againſt the continuance of ſubſcription to the articles againſt popery, above all others. For can any renunciation of the church of *Rome*, and of its erroneous and corrupt doctrines, be too explicit, againſt the ſubtle diſtinctions, equivocations, and mental reſervations of that church?

[p] *Strype's* Life of Archbiſhop *Parker*, book III. ch. xiii. xvi. p. 230. 244.

But,

But, inſtead of ſubſcription to the articles againſt popery, it is propoſed, That a declaration ſhould be required of perſons, who offer themſelves for orders, or preferment in the church, and for the miniſtry out of it, *That they are proteſtants.* But what will this one general declaration avail towards keeping papiſts out of either? will a *Jeſuit* ſcruple to declare himſelf a *proteſtant?* and if he is called upon to explain himſelf, which no body will have power to compel him to, will it not readily occur to him to ſay, That he meant only to *proteſt* againſt the tyranny of the *pope*, in diſſolving his order, and depriving him and his fraternity of their poſſeſſions?

Our proteſtant diſſenters always dreaded popery, as their moſt deadly enemy; and thought they could ſcarce ever be ſufficiently ſafe from it. And their jealouſy of it carried them ſo far, as to tax the church of *England* with being papiſtical, or popiſhly inclined, for having any thing in common with the church of *Rome*;

the leaſt rag of, which they could not bear the thoughts of. And are all their apprehenſions, and hatred of it, come to this at laſt? Hath popery changed its nature? And is it now ſo little formidable, that they can be content with the bare profeſſion of their being proteſtants; and need nothing more to protect them from it? Is it for fear of offending the delicacy of the Roman catholicks, that they dare not ſo much as add, that *they are not papiſts?* I hope, when they next apply to parliament, they will think ſome ſtronger bulwark neceſſary to be raiſed againſt popery. Sure I am, that they cannot give it any greater advantages, than by thus ſupinely expoſing themſelves to the incurſions of ſo watchful an enemy.

Of as little avail, in general, would a declaration, or ſubſcription, be, that a perſon was a chriſtian; and received the ſcriptures as the word of God, and as the rule of his faith and manners. For ſubſcription, in ſuch vague and general terms, would be little more than the ſhadow of

ſubſcription,

ſubſcription, to ſave appearances; and, at the ſame time, to evade the real intent and uſe of the law in this reſpect. Men may declare themſelves chriſtians, who ſcarce deſerve the name, and who hold very anti-chriſtian principles; and it is well known, that the vileſt hereticks have profeſſed the greateſt regard for the ſcriptures, and have ſheltered themſelves under the umbrage of them. But to return.

The author of the *Confeſſional* is under great apprehenſions of danger from the growth of popery among us: And I entirely approve of his zealous endeavours to excite the vigilance of our governors in church and ſtate againſt it, and its emiſſaries; and particularly againſt the moſt inſidious and intriguing of them all, the *Jeſuits*; who, ſince their expulſion from other kingdoms, muſt be ſuppoſed, and are known, to diſperſe themſelves in great numbers, in this, and all other proteſtant countries; and to appear in all ſhapes, more than ever. But we do not know what ſecret inſtructions they may have to

propagate popery, and the intereſt of mother-church; though ſhe ſeems to have proved but a ſtep-mother to them.

I agree with him in every thing he ſays about our danger from popery, and the *Jeſuits* particularly; but I can by no means agree with him, in the inference he draws from it. "You will aſk," ſays he, "what has all this to do with ſubſcription "to articles of religion; and the eſta-"bliſhment of confeſſions of faith and "doctrine, in proteſtant countries[q]?" We might know of ourſelves, that it certainly hath ſomething to do with them; but ſhould never dream of the uſe he makes of this; nor ever imagine, that the concluſion which he draws from hence is, That ſubſcription to articles of faith ſhould—not be enforced, or continued—but be entirely laid aſide—to thoſe very articles, he muſt mean, about one half of which are directly, and in expreſs words, leveled againſt the church of *Rome*; which he is under ſuch dread of. And yet, in the

[q] See Conf. pref. to firſt edit. p. c.

ſame

ſame breath, he endeavours to put us out of conceit with thoſe articles, among the reſt. As well might he go about to perſuade us, "Neighbours, your lands are "threatened with an inundation; there-"fore, by all means, down with your em-"bankments; and be ſure you level them "all with the ground." "Your houſe is "beſet with thieves: Therefore pray "throw open your doors to receive "them." The language of the *Confeſſional*, *mutatis mutandis*, is, in plain Engliſh, none other than this: And he, who talks in this manner, might well be ſuſpected of being an accomplice, were we not otherwiſe fully ſatisfied of this learned writer's proteſtant principles; and it is much to be regretted, that a perſon of ſuch abilities ſhould be ſo far blinded by his bigotry for the cauſe he is embarked in, as to ſtudy thus to impoſe upon himſelf, and others, by ſuch ſophiſtical reaſoning, as will prove *quidlibet ex quolibet*. But every unprejudiced perſon ſurely, who hath the free uſe of his ſenſes, will

ſee,

ſee, that the greater our danger is, the more it ſhould be guarded againſt; and that it is madneſs to throw down barriers and bulwarks, when there is the greateſt need of them. I hope therefore our ſenators will ſuffer the articles, againſt popery at leaſt, to continue in force, till we have ſomething better than a bare declaration, *that we are proteſtants*, ſubſtituted in their ſtead.

Nor would the making, and ſubſcribing, the declaration againſt popery, required by the act of toleration, much mend the matter, were it more explicit than it is. For, to argue with them on their own principles, Are not theſe human forms? are not the very terms unſcriptural? For I believe they will not find the words, *popery*, *papiſt*, or *proteſtant*, in their bibles. How then can they ſubſcribe any ſuch confeſſions, or declarations, which are not expreſſed in the words of ſcripture, any more than the *articles* of the church of *England?*

They

They ſcruple ſubſcribing thoſe, or any other human forms: And yet they can make, and ſubſcribe the delaration againſt popery of the 30th Car. II. ſtat. 2. c. 1. which is expreſſed in the hard unſcriptural words—*tranſubſtantiation*, *maſs*, *pope*, *equivocation*, *mental reſervation*, &c. What inconſiſtency!

Hence ſurely we muſt be fully convinced of the abſolute neceſſity of ſome *human forms*; which it is better to ſubmit to, than to condemn them all in the lump; and let men looſe, to run wild after their own vagaries; and to expoſe the ſimple and unwary to become a prey to the crafty ſeducer.

Another means which I mentioned, of keeping this church ſtedfaſt in the unity of faith, is, that uniformity of publick worſhip, which is eſtabliſhed by law in it: Whence the reading of the ſcriptures of both Old and New Teſtament, more, and more orderly, than I believe in any other church—the frequent repetition of its creeds —the conſtant uſe of the ſacraments—

and

and the interweaving of the ſame doctrines in its prayers and offices, which are contained in the articles—all this corroborates, and perpetuates the belief and profeſſion of them; habituates the people to them, and fixes them in their minds.

Add to this, That the diſcourſes of the clergy from the pulpit, and their printed works, being generally conformable to the doctrine of the church, do conſtantly contribute to inculcate and confirm the truth of it; and to preſerve the faith pure and uncorrupt, and the people ſtedfaſt in it, without being *toſſed about with every wind of doctrine*.

If the *ſame round of offices* be diſguſtful to ſome nice palates, there is room to ſuſpect their want of a true reliſh for devotion; there being ſuch a pleaſing variety, and alternation, in the ſeveral parts of the publick worſhip, according to the liturgy of the church of *England*, as ſufficiently recommends it to all ſober and pious chriſtians. It engages, and at the ſame time relieves, our attention; and the whole

whole is admirably contrived to keep up the ſpirit of devotion alive in our ſouls, throughout the whole ſervice: And if the unſtable, and fickle-minded, grow tired of ſuch *hackneyed forms*[t]; they muſt have more virtue than piety, or at leaſt a great happineſs of temper in other reſpects, not to be tired of themſelves, and all about them. If ſuch perſons had the new-modeling of our liturgy, I wonder how they would contrive it, to make it ever new, and ever pleaſing; unleſs they think, that *extempore* effuſions would better anſwer that intention; which can come but with an ill grace from any churchman. For our parts, it may not be amiſs to liſten to the wiſe man's advice, *not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

We cannot juſtly ſay, how well calculated the conſtitution of other churches, and congregations, among us are, for preſerving the chriſtian faith ſound and uncorrupt in them; becauſe they are more

[t] See *Confeſſional*, p. 18.

reſerved;

reſerved; at leaſt, their liturgies, or directories, are not made ſo publick. But, if we may judge of the tree by its fruit, the writings of their chief divines appear in a very different ſtrain from, nay are contrary to, the works of thoſe that went before them; not only in the doctrines relating to the divine decrees; but in the more important points of the ſatisfaction and divinity of the Son of God; not to mention other inſtances.

Some conſiderable helps, to keep them ſtedfaſt and united in the true faith, I apprehend, are wanting in moſt, if not all, our diſſenting congregations; ſuch as ſome certain ſtandard of doctrine—the uſe of ſome, or other, of the primitive creeds; and, if I have been rightly informed, none of them are uſed in the kirk of *Scotland*—the want of ſome ſettled forms of prayer in moſt of them—no obſervance of the great feſtivals, and of courſe no ſpecial commemoration of the great mercies of them. Add to this, that the neglect of ſubſcribing the doctrinal articles, with

the connivance at it, creates indifference, and makes room for a change of principles.

With regard to diſcipline, the old *Puritans* were remarkably ſtrict and rigid; but the preſent diſſenters in general are fallen into the contrary extreme. The platform ſet forth by the former was very narrow, and confined. The latter obſerve ſuch a latitude, that they ſcarce know how to contrive it wide enough[s].

Our articles were not Calviniſtical enough for the *Geneva* diſcipline; and our divines were cenſured for leaning too much to *Arminianiſm*. The articles, with

[s] See *Prieſtley's* form of diſcipline, in his addreſs to proteſtant diſſenters. There cannot be a more remarkable inſtance of the great relaxation of diſcipline among the diſſenters, than is to be ſeen in the perſon of this writer himſelf; who goes on uttering blaſphemies, without controul, or rebuke, from his brethren, or indeed from any others; while *Emlyn* was perſecuted in *Ireland*, and *Pierce*, *Withers*, and *Hallet*, in *England*, by the diſſenting clergy; and that within the memory of many now living, for writings much leſs offenſive to all ſerious chriſtians.

many

many now, are quite too *Calviniſtical*; and they have far outgone *Arminius* himſelf. The *Arminian* ſenſe of the articles was conſtrued formerly, as having a tendency to popery, if not to be papiſtical, in archbiſhop *Laud*, and others, who eſpouſed that ſenſe. It is now extended much farther by thoſe who profeſs the greateſt averſion to popery that can poſſibly be expreſſed [t].

But the main charge of all is, That the requiſition of ſubſcription to articles of faith in general is ſuch an unwarrantable impoſition, as is not to be juſtified, from any conſiderations of uſe, or neceſſity; nor from the examples of other churches; being a manifeſt infringement on the right of private judgement; the ſacred and inviolable privilege of all proteſtants.

This is a weighty objection, and deſerves to be very ſeriouſly conſidered: In order to which, it will be requiſite to go to the bottom of it; and carefully to examine this right of private judgement, on which it is founded.

[t] See p. 30. *ſuprà.*

To

To think, and judge for himſelf, in all matters pertaining to one's ſelf, is what every thinking being hath undoubtedly a very good right to. It is his birth-right, and is inherent in his very nature; nor can he be deprived of it, any more than he can be diveſted of himſelf. Think he muſt; and, as ſelf is ever uppermoſt in his thoughts, he will at all events think for himſelf; and it concerns, and is incumbent upon him, to extend his thoughts to every thing relating to his own welfare, temporal and ſpiritual. And his thoughts are his own, which no man can invade, or diſpoſſeſs him of; however he may be reſtrained in the outward workings of them.

On this right the Reformation was founded, nor can it ever be controverted upon proteſtant principles; and God forbid we ſhould ever be deprived of ſo valuable a privilege! But the queſtion is, whether this, in common with all our other rights, natural as well as civil, *in ſociety*, is not liable to ſome reſtraints and

limitations, in the uſe and reſult of it? And whether it hath not its proper ſphere of action, within which it ought to be confined?

If we are to take our meaſures in this enquiry, from the extent to which this right hath been carried of late, and aſſerted by its modern advocates; we muſt conclude, that the right of private judgement is abſolute, uncontroulable, and unalienable[u]. For, from being obliged to have recourſe to this right, on neceſſary and juſt occaſions; and from a modeſt and wary uſe of it, in reforming from the church of *Rome*; men have been emboldened by degrees to carry it to ſuch an extravagant height in all caſes, as to ſet it above all controul; and every abridgement of it, though made by lawful authority, they look upon as an uſurpation. But, if we examine this queſtion by the ſober rules of reaſon and religion, we ſhall be convinced, that this, as well as all other rights of men in ſociety, muſt be

[u] See *Confeſſional*, 1ſt edit. p. 194.

ſubject to ſome limitations, and become ſubordinate to the ſuperior rights of the ſociety in general.

The right of private judgement, by the very term of its being *private*, muſt be limited by a man's own private capacity, as an individual; and by the ſphere of his own private concerns, in matters which do not affect the publick. This is the proper ſphere of its action, as contradiſtinguiſhed from that of the publick: Nor do men, as highly as they affect to think of it, always give it full ſcope, even within theſe bounds; though the ſame men, in other caſes, will not brook the preſcribing of any bounds to it.

We are often at a loſs in judging for ourſelves, not only in ſpiritual, but in temporal matters likewiſe, of daily occurrence. In ſuch caſes, which come home to us, we perceive the weakneſs of our own judgements; and, very prudently diſtruſting them, we think it adviſeable to conſult our neighbours and friends; and to ſubmit our own to their better

judgements. In common intereſts, common conſultations become requiſite of courſe. When two, or three, are united in intereſt, it is natural for them to unite in council. Their united deliberations they find ſtrengthen their judgements, and are productive of riper determinations: And it is not uncommon for them to devolve the management of their whole concerns upon one of their number; in whoſe ſuperior wiſdom and diſcretion their experience hath taught them to confide. As the force of their judgements, when united, is ſtronger; ſo the right of exerciſing them becomes, by their union, ſtronger likewiſe. For ſeparate rights, being joined together, confirm and ſtrengthen each other. The rights of individuals conſiſting of ſo many units, when collected into one general ſum, that ſum muſt be equal to all its parts; and greater than any leſſer number of them. Therefore the right of the aggregate body muſt be greater than that of the individuals which form it, not only taken ſingly, but

but than all of them in their ſeparate capacities.

Apply this to the community. Whatever right of private judgement ſingle members of it have; theſe rights, being accumulated, grow ſtronger, and more perfect. If a private perſon may frame rules for his private conduct; the publick ſurely may do the ſame—may make laws for itſelf—for the well-ordering of its own government; that is, for every member of it, binding every one.

If there be a right of private judgement; this, in ſociety, muſt be productive of a right of publick judgement. For there ſurely is ſuch a thing as publick judgement, as well as private; and the one hath its rights no leſs than the other: Nay, it is becauſe there is a right of private judgement, that there muſt be a right of publick judgement likewiſe: For the one neceſſarily reſults from the other. Where theſe two rights claſh, the weaker muſt neceſſarily yield to the ſtronger; the private to the publick; muſt never interfere

with it, unleſs in very extraordinary caſes, in which compliance would be ſinful; but muſt ordinarily be ſuperſeded by it; be governed by its laws, and act in ſubordination to it; when that can be done without ſin. For it is a firſt principle in ſociety, that the inclinations of the minority muſt be over-ruled by the judgement and deciſion of the ſuperior number. And it is well-obſerved, "that in civil ſo-"ciety, compoſed, as it commonly is, of "ſuch an infinite number of heteroge-"neous and diſcordant principles and in-"tereſts, in trade, in politicks, and in re-"ligion; where ſubjects of contention "preſent themſelves by thouſands every "hour; no conſtitution can ſubſiſt a mo-"ment, without a conſtant reſignation of "private judgement to the judgement of "the publick [w]."

The ſame reaſoning, and the ſame principles, will hold good, with regard to civil

[w] Letter from a *Virginian* to the Members of the Congreſs at *Philadelphia*.

and

and eccleſiaſtical, ſecular and religious rights[x]: Nay, in matters of faith and religion, duly conſulted about, if but between two, or three, gathered together in Chriſt's name, he himſelf aſſuredly promiſeth his divine preſence, to ſuperintend, guide, and direct, their councils[y]. This is more than he hath promiſed expreſsly to private judgement; or to conſultations ſeparate from, and eſpecially in oppoſition to, any publick ones of his church.

[x] Judicium (humanum) ut ad actiones privatas chriſtiani cujuſque, ita ad publicas actiones, et privatas, quæ publico imperio reguntur, publicarum eſt poteſtatum; et quidem ſummarum in ſummo gradu. Vidit hoc jampridem Brentius, cujus hæc ſunt verba (Proleg.), Ut privatus privatam, ita princeps publicam habet de doctrinâ religionis poteſtatem judicandi, et decidendi. Et ita judicio opus eſt, præſertim principum, ut ſciant quam doctrinam, et privatim ad ſuam ſalutem æternam, et publice in populo Dei tueri debeant.—Grot. de imperio ſumm. poteſtatum, cap. v. ſect. 5.—A treatiſe, which was written by this great man, in behalf of the Remonſtrants, againſt thoſe in power who oppreſſed them.

[y] Matt. xviii. 20.

I hope it will not be diſputed, but that the church of Chriſt is a ſociety. This appears, in a good meaſure, from what hath been obſerved already; and that it is, in its deſign and conſtitution, the moſt perfect ſociety of all others; having Chriſt himſelf for its head; founded by him upon a rock; the moſt firmly built, and eſtabliſhed upon the wiſeſt laws; and the moſt cloſely united, and compacted together, in all its parts. This is eſſential to the nature of the chriſtian religion; one of the chief deſigns for which it was calculated, being to make human ſociety, as well as human nature, perfect. And it militates againſt the very temper and genius of it, to engage in any meaſures which have a tendency to deſtroy or diſturb the harmony of the ſociety conſtituted by it.

If therefore the church of Chriſt be a ſociety, it muſt ſubſiſt, as all other ſocieties do, by the ſame general laws of ſociety; which are very different from thoſe of a ſtate of nature, which indeed

cannot

cannot properly be ſaid to know ſcarce any laws at all.

Every man born in ſociety is neceſſarily abridged much in his natural rights, religious as well as civil. When he comes of age to examine them, he will find himſelf abridged of them; and that they had been transferred, by the laws of the conſtitution, under which he lives, to thoſe who bear rule over him; who, as they judged for him before he was in a capacity of judging for himſelf; ſo they go on to judge for him ſtill, in conſequence of that right of publick judgement which they have; and of which no man, in his private capacity, can lawfully diſpoſſeſs them.

The author of the *Confeſſional* ſeems to queſtion, whether a man may transfer, or abridge himſelf, of his right of private judgement[2]: And he treats this, as giving way to an uſurpation of Chriſt's authority; who is King in his own kingdom; and only Lord in matters of conſcience;

[2] P. 192. 1ſt edit.

and

and he aſſerts, but not proves, that he hath reſerved this authority to himſelf; and hath delegated no part of it.

But the truth of the caſe is, according to what was juſt now obſerved, that this right is transferred already; and every man is neceſſarily abridged of it, and previouſly to any act or deed of his own, whereby he might either transfer, or retain it; and before he was capable of doing either; and that by the very nature of man, as well as by the laws of ſociety; whereby no man was ever in actual poſſeſſion of this right at his firſt ſetting out in life. For we all get into poſſeſſion of it gradually, as we grow in underſtanding; whereby we are enabled to exerciſe it. For he needs not be told, that there is a time when we are not capable of judging for ourſelves: And will this gentleman call it an invaſion of the right of private judgement, or an uſurpation of Chriſt's authority, in others, under whoſe care we are placed, to judge for us under that incapacity?

Even

Even this learned author himſelf, poſſeſſed of a good natural judgement, as he certainly is, to an eminent degree, improved by ſtudy and application, and ripened by years and experience, ſeems, in the very inſtance which he is judging about, to be rather diffident of his own judgement; as he makes it a queſtion, which he leaves undetermined, Whether he can transfer, or abridge himſelf of, his right to uſe it for himſelf?

With regard to the authority of Chriſt our Lord and King, he doth not exerciſe it here any otherwiſe than inwardly by his Spirit, and outwardly in his word; and by the overſeers and governors of his church. Theſe powers are very conſiſtent with each other[1]. And that he hath

[1] Summum Chriſti judicium, huic de quo agimus judicio, (nempe judicio ſummarum poteſtatum circa ſacra) non magis repugnat, quam ejuſdem imperium, ſummarum poteſtatum imperio; quod ſupra oſtendiſſe ſatis eſt. Legiſlatio præmium pœnamque æternam vi ſuâ ferens, et ex eâ lege ultima judicatio, ſolius eſt Chriſti. Medio tempore interfatur Chriſtus per Spiritum

hath delegated *ſome part* of his authority to them, whom he hath appointed to exerciſe it, is ſufficiently plain, and cannot be conteſted with any ſhew of argument, from the ſolemn inveſtiture and delivery of the keys; which are enſigns and emblems of authority; and this repeatedly confirmed by expreſs declarations to the ſame effect [b]. The contrary opinion is that of the *Fifth-monarchy men*, which I hope is not going to be revived.

We are initiated into Chriſt's kingdom by baptiſm, and made his diſciples, and ſubjects, by his miniſters. During our minority, we are under tutors and governors, in our religious, as well as civil capacities. Being ſuppoſed by the law not fit to judge and act for ourſelves, in either reſpect, we have others appointed to judge and act for us. When we grow up, we

ritum ſuum judicio divino; neque tamen ſequitur id judicium actio humana, niſi intercedente judicio humano. Grot. ib. ſub titulo, Non obſtare (judicio ſummarum poteſtatum circa ſacra), quod Chriſtus eſt ſummus judex.

[b] See Matt. xvi. 19. — xviii. 18. John xx. 23.

continue

continue to have paſtors and teachers; from whom we are ſuppoſed to imbibe our religious principles; and to be farther taught and guided by, in the knowledge and practice of Chriſtianity. And many, too many, notwithſtanding all the inſtruction they receive, are but poorly qualified to exerciſe their right of private judgement, in this reſpect, as long as they live. Not only the ignorant and illiterate, but many others of competent knowledge and learning, ſubmit themſelves to the guidance of others—of thoſe particularly, whoſe profeſſion and office is ſuppoſed to qualify them for ſuch a truſt; and that not merely out of indolence and indifference; but often on account of other occupations, other ſtudies and profeſſions; and out of a modeſt diffidence of their own judgements; and a becoming ſubmiſſion and deference to the judgements of ſuch, as they, on good probability, preſume are better able to judge for them, than they are for themſelves[c].

[c] Vide Grot. *ib.* p. 228.

And

And thus they may be ſaid to repoſe a kind of implicit faith in the judgement of the church; even of the proteſtant church under which they live. Let not any one be ſtartled at the expreſſion. There is a great difference between the *making* of ſuch a faith neceſſary, by keeping the people in ignorance; and its *becoming* neceſſary by their own neglect, or incapacity; or otherwiſe expedient, by a voluntary and confidential repoſal of it. And there will be more or leſs of this latter in all proteſtant, as well as popiſh countries, in proportion as men continue ignorant, and incapable, and ſatisfied with it: And till it wears off, the beſt expedient to ſupply the want of an explicit faith, or knowledge, is the teaching of faithful paſtors in the doctrines of a ſound and orthodox church. And perhaps it would be much better, as well for their real edification, as for the peace and unity of the church, if the people would be content with ſuch teaching; rather than to ſwerve from it, and *turn aſide into vain jangling*; whence

whence they come to ſuch a paſs, as *not to endure ſound doctrine*; but having *itching ears, heap to themſelves teachers, who underſtand neither what they ſay, nor whereof they affirm*; *deceiving and being deceived*[d].

Thus people ſet up to judge for themſelves, before they are duly qualified for it: No wonder therefore they ſo often judge amiſs. It is a premature, and *injudicious* uſe of their own *judgement*, not tempered with humility, which miſleads them. When they acquire more true chriſtian knowledge, they will be leſs conceited; and leſs liable to be *toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men, and cunning craftineſs, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*[e].

On the other hand, the doctrine and practice of implicit faith was ſo ſhamefully impoſed upon its vaſſals by the church of *Rome*, that it was high time for people to open their eyes, and to judge for themſelves; when they found they

[d] 2 Tim. iv. 3. — iii. 13. [e] Eph. iv. 14.

had

had been ſo much abuſed by it, and it had been made the vehicle of the moſt groſs, monſtrous, and abſurd impoſitions.

Many of thoſe who had emancipated themſelves from its ſhackles, held this doctrine in ſuch diſdain, and were ſo jealous of it, that they thought they could hardly run far enough from it; and therefore never ſtopt till they got into the contrary extreme. And now this is generally looked upon as a bug-bear, quite baniſhed from among all ſound proteſtants; and ſcarce known to have ſhelter any where out of the church of *Rome*. They think no quarter ought to be given it; and any one, who ſhould offer a word in its behalf, would perhaps be charged, by the author of the *Confeſſional*, as *edging* towards popery.

Notwithſtanding, I muſt own myſelf ſo much a *papiſt*, as to ſay for *implicit faith*, that there is, and ever will be, much of it in the world, whether we will or no. It creeps into every department of life in ſpite of us. It is neceſſary to the very neceſ-

neceſſaries of it. We can neither eat, drink, nor ſleep, without it: Neither can we keep it out of the church, or conventicle.

It may not here be improper to ſpeak a word, or two, to the caſe of youth being required to ſubſcribe to the *Thirty-nine articles of religion*, at their matriculation into the univerſity of *Oxford*.

Theſe young perſons are generally in a ſtate of minority; and are not deemed, by the laws of their country, to have diſcretion enough for the management of their own ſecular affairs. The municipal law of the univerſity is, in this reſpect, perfectly conformable to the law of the land in general: And is it not fit it ſhould be ſo? It cannot be expected they ſhould be better qualified to judge of abſtruſe points in divinity, than of the propriety of laying out their own money. They have been hitherto under guardians and tutors: They are neceſſarily ſo ſtill. Are they notwithſtanding deſirous of knowing what they ſubſcribe? and reſolved to ſtudy and weigh

every article, before they ſignify their aſſent and conſent to it in writing? If ſo, they are quite in the right. They are much to be commended, and by all means to be encouraged and aſſiſted in their enquiries. If they meet with any unſurmountable difficulties, which they cannot ſubmit to the determination of their ſuperiors, let them with-hold their hands, and be content to turn their backs, without ſubſcribing at all, until they are better ſatisfied. No body compels them to ſubſcribe: But if they think fit to acquieſce in the judgement of the learned body, into which they are going to be incorporated; they may ſafely ſubſcribe theſe articles, though they may not underſtand them, nor have ever read them: And this they may do in the ſame implicit manner, as they do in a thouſand other inſtances. The articles may be conſidered, as an initiating lecture, or as the foundation of a courſe of lectures; which it is proper they ſhould pay the like attention to, as to the ſubſequent lectures delivered to them, both

publick and private. And if it is not unſuitable to the ſtate of grown perſons, as men and chriſtians, to pay a proper deference to the doctrine of their teachers, and to the wiſdom of the church; it is much more becoming the modeſty and ingenuity of youth, to pay that obedience of their underſtanding to thoſe, of whom they come to learn.

Such ſtudents of the univerſity, as are deſigned for the miniſtry of the church, muſt of courſe make theſe articles a part of their ſtudy, as a neceſſary preparation for it; their unfeigned aſſent and conſent to the doctrines contained in them being what they will be again required to ſignify in writing, in order to their admiſſion into the miniſtry; and then they are ſuppoſed to do it more explicitly. And I will not diſſemble my wiſhes, that the *Thirty-nine articles of religion*, and divinity in general, were more ſtudied, and lectured upon, both in publick and private, than I doubt they are, in both univerſities. Young men would not then come ſo poorly qualified,

when they offer themſelves for holy orders, as, I ſpeak from experience, I have been too often grieved to find them.

As matters ſtand, ſufficient time is allowed ſtudents in both univerſities to peruſe and weigh the purport of the articles; and either to proceed in their deſign, or betake themſelves to other callings, or profeſſions, if they ſcruple ſubſcribing to them. For this is required by our church of none, but members of the univerſity, clergymen, or miniſters, and ſchool-maſters; though other churches have extended this teſt much farther.

Fuller obſerves, that in the church of *England*, "no lay perſon," except as above, "was required to ſubſcribe; no magi-"ſtrate; none of the commons, according "to the ſeverity in other places. For the "perſecuted church of the *Engliſh* in "*Frankford*, in Queen *Mary's* days, de-"manded ſubſcription to their diſcipline "of every man, yea even of women: "And the *Scotch*, in the minority of "King *James*, exacted it of noblemen, "gentlemen,

"gentlemen, and courtiers; which here "was extended only to men of eccleſi- "aſtical functions[f]." And the holy diſcipline of the *Puritans* here in *England* enjoined, "That every one, as well men "as women, which deſired to be received "into their congregation, ſhould make a "declaration, or confeſſion of their faith, "before the miniſters, and elders, ſhewing "himſelf fully to conſent and agree with "the doctrine of the church; and ſub- "mitting themſelves to the diſcipline of "the ſame; and the ſame to teſtify, by "ſubſcribing thereto, if they can write[g]." And every member of the congregation was obliged to render a declaration of his faith before the miniſters and elders, whenever they thought fit to require it: Nor were any to be admitted to the communion, without making a confeſſion of

[f] *Fuller's* Eccleſ. Hiſt. book ix. p. 72.

[g] Biſhop *Maddock's* Anſwer to *Neale*, p. 51. The quotation is in the words of the original, the grammaticalneſs of which I will not anſwer for.

their

their faith, and ſubmitting themſelves to the diſcipline.

From this comparative view, none can help acknowledging the moderation of the church of *England* in this reſpect.

But the author of the *Confeſſional* diſputes the right of eſtabliſhing confeſſions of faith at all[h]: And denies, that the church hath any authority to require ſubſcription to articles of faith, or religion[i].

Its authority in this reſpect may be defended even upon the principle of the right of private judgement itſelf. For if every private chriſtian hath a right to judge for himſelf; every chriſtian ſociety muſt have this right, *a fortiori*. Though, if we diſtinguiſh properly in this caſe, it was by the prince, that learned divines in the church were ordered and authorized, to draw up its articles; and it was by his authority, or rather by that of the whole legiſlature, including church and ſtate, that ſubſcription was, and is, required to

[h] P. 31. [i] P. 88.

be

be made to them: And this ſubſcription is made a condition of holding preferment by the ſtate, as well as the church.

Indeed, this gentleman diſputes the authority of the one, as well as the other, for requiring any ſuch ſubſcription; in whom we have an inſtance of a church of *England* man agreeing with papiſts and diſſenters, in denying princes the authority of making laws in church-matters. But I hope every prince, either by himſelf, or in conjunction with thoſe who ſhare the government with him, hath power to enact laws, for the well-ordering of that government, with which he is entruſted: And the articles of the church of *England* are part of the law of the land; to which the ſame regard ſhould be paid, as to the other parts of it; and it is as reaſonable to plead exemption from the one, as the other.

A man, to qualify himſelf for civil offices, muſt take ſuch and ſuch oaths; for eccleſiaſtical functions, he muſt ſubſcribe a certain body of articles. If he ſcruple

to take ſuch oaths, he gives up all thoughts of ſuch office: And if he ſcruple ſubſcribing thoſe articles, ſhould he not be content to drop the function?

This is a preliminary condition to be complied with. Every man undoubtedly may, and ought to think for himſelf, in his private capacity. But no private man can go farther. If he aſpire to act in a publick capacity, he muſt ſubmit to the laws appointed by the publick—by thoſe who are inveſted with publick authority in that reſpect; of whatever nature his employment be, whether eccleſiaſtical or civil: The ſame rule of conduct ſhould be obſerved in the church, as in the ſtate, in religious, as in civil concerns.

Every ſociety likewiſe hath ſurely a natural right to do every thing neceſſary to its own preſervation; in which general right is included that of beſtowing offices. Thus a number of travellers have a right to chuſe for themſelves a guide for their journey: A number of voyagers, a pilot for

for their ſhip: And a free nation hath a right to chuſe a king [k].

Hence it follows, that every ſociety hath a right of preſcribing the conditions, on which, and on which alone, it beſtows its offices, and every thing elſe relating to them. The church of *England*, as a ſociety, beſtows the office of teaching, and adminiſtering the word and ſacraments, upon condition of ſubſcribing to her articles of faith and religion: And herein ſhe requires no more than what ſhe hath a natural right to require, according to the above argument; by which alone ſuch requiſition is ſufficiently juſtified.

But moreover, the depriving her of this right would be depriving her of a privilege, which every private chriſtian hath a claim to—the privilege of judging for herſelf. The

[k] Thus argues *Grotius*. Naturaliter cœtui unicuique permittitur ea procurare, quæ ad conſervationem ſui ſunt neceſſaria: In quo numero eſt functionum applicatio. Ita viatores multi jus habent eligendi gubernatorem ſuæ navis; viatores itineris ducem; populus liber regem. Grot. ib. cap. x. ſect. 3.

church,

church, the body of chriſtians in general, in their publick and collective capacity, is denied that privilege by ſome of her members, which they daily exerciſe themſelves without reſerve, in publick, as well as private.

They likewiſe deny her the privilege of expreſſing her own ſenſe of ſcripture in her own words; which if they themſelves were denied, we ſhould not fail to hear ſuch an unreaſonable reſtraint laid upon chriſtian liberty, loudly, and indeed juſtly remonſtrated againſt. They will ſubmit to no *human explanations* of ſcripture—to no *human creeds*, or articles of faith whatſoever. But every explanation, or interpretation, which the church makes, muſt be expreſſed in the words of ſcripture only[1]. Would they themſelves ſubmit to this injunction which they want to lay upon her? Would they be willing, or even able to bear it? Since they take upon them to preſcribe laws to the church, they ſhould at leaſt be well aſſured of the practicability

[1] In this they have the countenance of the old *Levelers*; who would allow of no argument from ſcripture, but in the expreſs words of ſcripture itſelf.

of

of them. Let them therefore, to this end, try the experiment firſt themſelves, and apply the rule of expreſſing their ſenſe of ſcripture in none but ſcripture-words, to their own practice; which it is but fair they ſhould do; and they will ſoon find what wretched work they would make of it. They will be as ready to lay it aſide, as *David* was to put off *Saul's* armour, which he had not proved.

Scripture is undoubtedly the beſt interpreter of ſcripture, as far as it will go; and *ſpiritual things* are beſt *compared with ſpiritual.* But farther explanations are often neceſſary; in which, from the nature of the thing, a latitude of expreſſion muſt be made uſe of: Otherwiſe our liberty will be ſo cramped, that we ſhall every now and then be at a loſs how to expreſs ourſelves; and all the latitude poſſible is often little enough to convey our own ſenſe with clearneſs and preciſion; and to guard againſt miſapprehenſion and cavil. If we keep to the ſenſe of ſcripture, and the analogy of faith, the mode of expreſſion can be attended with no ill

conſequences; otherwiſe the very letter of ſcripture, in bad, or unſkilful hands, might be turned againſt itſelf.

The *Confeſſional* furniſhes us with inſtances of the *Calviniſts* charging the *Remonſtrants* with cheriſhing the worſt meanings under ſcripture-words; and of the *Remonſtrants* bringing the ſame accuſation againſt another ſet of men [m].

If this rule of rejecting all human explanations, and ſticking to the words of ſcripture only, were always obſerved, the province of divinity would lie within a very narrow compaſs; and an infinite variety and profuſion of books, and learned labour would be ſaved. There would be an end of teaching, and preaching; nor would there be any room left for writing on this, or any other ſubject in divinity; we would have nothing to do, but to read our bibles; and, if no human creeds are allowed of, we ſhall not have ſo much as the apoſtle's creed left us.

[m] P. 75.

For

For what ends then are ſuch rigid terms preſcribed to the framers of confeſſions, and articles of faith, but to tie up their hands, that all others may be free from any reſtraint upon their principles? This is plainly no more than a ſubterfuge, to evade the ſubſcribing of any confeſſion, or articles of faith whatſoever. If theſe reformers are to have their wills, and to go on at this rate, how much of our Chriſtianity will they leave us?

With the like view, ſyſtems of divinity have been much inveighed againſt, and ſyſtematical divines have been arraigned; in general terms indeed, but in ſuch terms, as if there were ſomething monſtrous in them; and as if they were pregnant with I know not what miſchief. But is there any thing ſo very bad in ſyſtems, and the writers of them, as ſuch? A ſyſtem of any ſcience is a methodical combination and arrangement of parts, concurring to make one conſiſtent whole: And a ſyſtem of divinity is, in other words, no more than a conſiſtent body of divinity. And

ſhould

ſhould it not be ſuch? Should not every whole be ſo fitly framed together, as to have the concurrence and conſent of all its parts conſpiring to the formation of it? Without which, it would be ſuch a motley and ridiculous piece, as the poet deſcribes—

——— ——— *ut nec pes, nec caput uni*
Reddatur formæ ——— *cui unus et alter*
Aſſuitur pannus ———

I hope the holy ſcripture will be allowed to be conſiſtent with itſelf in all its parts. Therefore ſurely it is poſſible a conſiſtent ſcheme of *agenda et credenda* may be drawn from it. The Ten Commandments are a ſyſtem of moral duties. Are they the worſe for that? The Apoſtles Creed contains a ſyſtem of truths to be believed, not indeed in ſcripture terms, *totidem verbis*; yet in ſubſtance to be found there. Is this the reaſon why that, and all other creeds, are condemned? There were creeds before there were any written goſpels; for we find references to, and recitals of, ſome ſhort formularies of this

kind

kind in the goſpels themſelves. I hope they will let us have them.

I own there may have been ſyſtems of divinity ſo clumſily drawn up, and ſo awkwardly put together, as not to harmonize with themſelves; and glaring contradictions might perhaps be found in them. Some likewiſe may contain doctrines that are inconſiſtent with the analogy of faith. Let ſuch, if ſuch there be, be pointed out, and rejected. But let not all ſyſtematical, and regular writings be condemned in the lump, for the ſake of them. Syſtematical writers are much diſdained, for their being narrow-minded, and too much cramped and confined in their notions. Their notions, I preſume, are grounded upon ſcripture, by which their minds are limited; and within which I am ſure they may find room enough to expatiate. If others contend for tranſgreſſing theſe bounds, to themſelves be it. *We have no ſuch cuſtom, nor the churches of God.*

I wiſh

I wiſh ſuch conſiderations as theſe may contribute to overcome that averſion, which many have conceived againſt ſyſtems in general; and plead ſo far in their behalf, that they may have fair quarter given them. For it is with no particular view to the church of *England*, any otherwiſe than as it is a branch of the catholick church of Chriſt, profeſſing a conſiſtent ſet of doctrines, that I have offered this apology for ſyſtems of divinity; which are alone quarreled with. For I do not find, that ſyſtems in other ſciences are at all diſapproved of; a ſhrewd ſign that there is ſomething worſe at bottom; which this is but a veil for.

To what hath been ſaid concerning the right of private judgement, it may not be amiſs to add a few conſiderations on the *exerciſe* of that right.

And here ſurely ſome *decorum* ſhould be obſerved in this reſpect; ſome regard paid by individuals to the whole body; and ſome degree of veneration ſhould be reckoned due from private chriſtians, in

judging

judging for themſelves, to the judgement of thoſe *who bear rule over them, and watch for their ſouls, attending continually on this very thing.*

The exerciſe of private judgement is not only the right, but the duty of all chriſtians, as far as they have it in their power; that they may be able to *give a reaſon of the hope that is in them.*

But let them at the ſame time remember, that this judgement of theirs is *private*; in virtue of which, they can have no right, or pretence, to dictate to others—much leſs to the church in general—and much leſs ſtill ſhould they ſet up their own judgements in oppoſition to hers—to thwart and contradict it—diſdain all deference to her judgement; and aſſume ſuch a ſelf-ſufficiency, as ſets itſelf above all government and control.

Every good chriſtian, and every peaceable member of ſociety, in the exerciſe of his private judgement, how far ſoever he is capable of carrying it, will put the moſt favourable conſtruction upon doctrines and

ordinances, grown venerable by age; and long ago eſtabliſhed by lawful authority. He will endeavour to bring his own ſentiments into a conformity to them, as far as is conſiſtent with the clear dictates of reaſon and ſcripture. He will be more inclined, when doubts ariſe, to ſuſpect ſome error in his own apprehenſions, ſome fallacy in his own reaſonings, than in deciſions grounded on ſuch reſpectable ſanctions. He will proceed with the utmoſt caution; and will get the beſt information he can have, for the ſolving of his doubts and difficulties. He will add prayer to ſtudy; and beſeech God to illuminate his underſtanding, rectify his errors, and to grant him a right apprehenſion, in this, and all other reſpects. And if, after all his endeavours, he finds himſelf under a neceſſity of differing in judgement from his ſuperiors, he will keep his ſentiments to himſelf; unleſs he thinks it will be more for the good of religion to divulge them: In which caſe, he will do it with modeſty, deference, and openneſs

openneſs to conviction; *not contentious, heady, high-minded*—not *deſpiſing government*, nor *preſumptuous, and ſelf-willed*; but *afraid to ſpeak evil of dignities*[n]. Though he be ever ſo fully perſuaded in his own mind; he will caſt down his own reaſonings, rather than deſtroy the unity, or diſturb the peace, of the church. That charity which he owes to all mankind, he will think is more eſpecially due to the eſtabliſhed church—that charity, which *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*[o].

He will conſider, that under a free and ſettled government, every man is ſuppoſed to have given his conſent, either expreſsly, or tacitly, by himſelf, or his repreſentatives, to all its laws and injunctions; and that there is but one, and the ſame rule to judge by, in all caſes, relating to all the parts of it, in church and ſtate: And as in the ſtate we are to ſubmit to all its laws, enacted by lawful authority, which are

[n] 2 Tim. iii. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 10.

[o] 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

agreeable to its conſtitution; and have a tendency to preſerve, and not to overthrow, and deſtroy it: So in the church, while her antient conſtitution is preſerved; and no innovations in doctrine, nor incroachments of power, are made, or attempted; here the ſubject hath no cauſe to complain; nor any pretence to withdraw his ſubmiſſion, or exerciſe his right of private judgement; ſo far as to diſturb the peace of the church; to excite jealouſies; or foment diviſions in, or ſeparations from her.

The church of *England* cannot be juſtly charged with any attempts of theſe kinds. With regard to doctrine, it hath been already obſerved, that it is invariably the ſame, as it was, when firſt ſettled at the Reformation; no formal alterations having been made in it; nor any conſiderable departure from it; whatever hath been the caſe with regard to individuals; who may have held opinions different from, or contrary to, the eſtabliſhed faith and doctrine; which are not to be placed to her account,

account, as long as the foundation laid in her articles, conformably to ſcripture, ſtandeth ſure; and ſhe holds faſt the profeſſion of them.

With regard to power, the *moderation* of our church *is known unto all men*, and is often praiſed by foreigners, and others, who are not of her communion. Her government is ſo far from making any encroachments; that it is neceſſarily reſtrained, in the exerciſe of diſcipline, and all outward juriſdiction, by her being incorporated with the ſtate. This want of a ſtricter diſcipline is often lamented by her beſt friends, and the reſtoration of it is much wiſhed for by herſelf [p]. But that is become the leſs practicable, on account of her powers having been farther abridged by the toleration. The exemption of ſuch numerous bodies from her juriſdiction, is what ſhe hath little cauſe to regret, as it renders her burden the lighter: But it is matter of real grief and concern to her, that too many libertines, within her own boſom, are ready enough to take advantage

[p] See the Commination-office.

from hence, for ſpurning at her authority, and bidding defiance to her laws; as they know they have an eaſy way to evade them. Hence her cenſures are in a great meaſure laid aſide, or otherwiſe are diſregarded. Her laws are not carried into execution; and are encroached upon by prohibitions from the temporal courts: And the convocation never ſits now to do buſineſs. This hath expoſed her to the inſults, not only of ſuch as are without; but even of her own gremial ſons; thoſe who eat of her bread, lifting up their heel againſt her.

On the other hand, we have reaſon to be thankful to the Divine Providence, and under it, to our governors in church and ſtate, for having preſerved to our church the privileges, which ſhe doth ſtill enjoy. If ſhe is deprived of any of her original powers; ſhe eſcapes the *odium* of exerciſing them: And if in ſome things ſhe is overruled by the ſtate; ſhe derives, from her coalition with it, the ſupport, ſtrength, and ſtability, of the common conſtitution.

The

The controverſy, ſo warmly debated, at the end of the laſt, and beginning of the preſent century, about the rights and privileges of the convocation, though it then produced nothing but heat, and a ſuſpenſion of thoſe very rights and privileges; yet they have been the better cleared up, and aſcertained, by this controverſy; and it ſerves as a caution to all future convocations, when their deliberations are called for, to obſerve greater temper in their debates. And it is hoped the time is not very diſtant, when the wiſdom of government may ſee reaſon for a convocation to tranſact buſineſs; which will be of the higheſt importance and benefit to this church; if properly conducted, and brought to a happy iſſue.

If the coercive powers of the church are reſtrained, ſhe enjoys the powers of perſuaſion in their full force; which are derived from a higher authority, and ſavour of the primitive ſimplicity of paſtoral power. And theſe ſpiritual powers, when properly exerted, carry ſuch force and energy

energy with them, as renders the exerciſe of any temporal power the leſs neceſſary; and the want of it to be the leſs regretted.

It is not to be diſſembled, that our diſcipline is fallen into ſo relaxed a ſtate, as not to be many removes from *Eraſtianiſm*. Yet even this hath its advantages, as we have partly ſeen: To which may be added, that the imputation of an enſlaving, tyrannical, hierarchy cannot, with any juſtice, be applicable to our church at preſent, whatever it might have been heretofore; though it is as liberally applied to her now, as if ſhe were in the *zenith* of her power, and enforced it with the utmoſt rigour. Indeed, an hierarchy, as ſuch, hath nothing tyrannical, or even arbitrary, in the idea of it. The title is venerable; it being a government *in ſacris*, adminiſtered by perſons of a ſacerdotal character; which therefore the church of *England* hath a juſt claim to, though it was never affected by her. And if uſed only by way of diſtinction from preſbyterian, or rather independent, government, which is partly

adminiſtered by laymen, it hath nothing improper or invidious in it. But this ſacred government having been abuſed by the church of *Rome* to the worſt of purpoſes, uſurping *dominion over men's faith, and lording it over God's heritage*, in a moſt cruel and tyrannical manner, the idea of deſpotick power was transferred to the hierarchy of the church of *England*, by thoſe who were diſaffected towards her; and the imputation, however undeſervedly, hath been induſtriouſly propagated ever ſince.

The church of *England* diſclaims all pretenſions to ſupremacy; and acknowledges the King's Majeſty to be, under Chriſt, the ſupreme head of the church, as well as of the ſtate. This acknowledgement is founded in the *act* of ſubmiſſion, made to King *Henry* VIII, which continued in force during the reign of *Edward* VI, and was revived 1 *Elizabeth*. An oath was framed in recognition of this ſupremacy; and enjoined to be taken by all officers and miniſters, eccleſiaſtical

and

and civil. The *thirty-ſeventh article* of religion agrees with this oath; and ſo do the *canons* of 1603. Our church teaches obedience to be paid, by all orders and ranks of men, to our Sovereign Lord the King: And the government which ſhe claims, and exerciſes, is only a ſubordinate one, for the more regular and decent proviſion for, and obſervation of, the divine worſhip, and ordinances; and for the neceſſary maintenance of order and diſcipline. She ſets up no *imperium in imperio*, to thwart, or curb, the civil government; as the church of *Rome* doth in countries ſubject to her—makes no encroachments on the laws of the ſtate, nor claſhes with it in any reſpect. She holds no principles inimical to, nor derogatory from, the ſecular government; and maintains ſuch only, as are conformable to it, and contribute to its ſupport. The law of the church, is the civil and canon law, interpreted, and carried into execution, not by clergymen, but civilians; who preſide over, and occupy, her courts; and almoſt all

the eccleſiaſtical courts of the kingdom are kept by laymen.

This, indeed, hath been urged, as one of the principal objections againſt the government of our church. But it comes with no good grace from thoſe, who place ſo much of their diſcipline in the hands of lay perſons, not profeſſing the law, nor ordinarily diſtinguiſhed by any ſuperior qualifications for their office. The biſhops are cenſured for devolving ſo much of their power upon their chancellors; and yet the hierarchy is thought to have too much power ſtill. In the days of popiſh ignorance, few, beſides the clergy, had much knowledge of the law; and they bare a great ſway in our courts of law, in general [q]; the people being kept in ignorance of that, as well as all other branches of ſcience. When learning began to be cultivated; the ſtudy of the law, being ſo

[q] Antiently the maſters of chancery, and of the rolls; the clerks in chancery, and of the exchequer; were all clergymen. And the clerks of the King's courts, and of parliament, were clergymen alſo.

uſeful

uſeful a part of it, was not neglected. This by degrees became a diſtinct profeſſion; and our courts of law were occupied by laymen, in proportion as they became learned in it. The clergy, of courſe, were then leſs wanted in that department; and the Reformation taking place, there was ſufficient employment for them in promoting it; and in the more proper ſtudies and duties of their function, in conſequence of it; which in truth continue to be the moſt proper for them ſtill. They therefore withdrew from the ſtudy and practice of the civil law, which, ſtrictly ſpeaking, was foreign to their profeſſion: Or, rather, they gave place to thoſe, who devoted themſelves to this particular ſcience; and who therefore are juſtly deemed to be the beſt ſkilled in it; and beſt qualified to adminiſter and diſpenſe it. Their merit of courſe entitles them to the emoluments of it. And they undoubtedly would think it an injurious encroachment, if the clergy were now to rival them in it.

There is nothing intolerant in the conſtitution of the church of *England*; and *Rapin*, a profeſſed preſbyterian, doth her the juſtice to acknowledge, "that he doth "not find in her principles, or doctrines, "any thing repugnant to charity, or "tending to violence[r]."

The preſbyterian government is much extolled for its mildneſs and moderation; its principles of liberty and popularity; and its freedom from the ſhackles of churchmen. This government was once eſtabliſhed over this nation; and from the teſt of experience, the ſureſt of all others, we have no reaſon to admire it ſo much, in preference to that of the church of *England*.

If we examine that platform of diſcipline, which was long ſo ſtrenuouſly contended for; and which at length prevailed to be ſet up, upon the ruins of the church of *England*; and was exerciſed for a while; we ſhall ſoon be convinced of the difference between them; and perceive,

[r] *Rapin's* Hiſt. of England, 1632.

which

which hath the beſt title to meekneſs, and moderation; and which is to be thought the more arbitrary and tyrannical; and even ſeditious, and dangerous to government.

This diſcipline, in an account given of it, extracted from the writings of the *Puritans* themſelves, who lived under the reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, appears to have had a manifeſt tendency to the overthrow of her Majeſty's government and prerogative, as well in cauſes civil, as eccleſiaſtical, in the following inſtances, among many others—In depriving her Majeſty of all right to patronage in the church—By claiming the laſt appeal, and the ſupreme authority, in all cauſes and matters eccleſiaſtical—By making her Majeſty ſubject to the cenſures, and excommunications of their elderſhips, and other aſſemblies—By authorizing certain magiſtrates, even to depoſe their ſovereign, either by war, or otherwiſe, if he ſeemed to them to break covenant—By teaching that the government of the commonwealth muſt be

be framed to the government of the church; whereby it muſt of courſe be made republican. They farther claimed an immunity of the revenues of perſons eccleſiaſtical, from publick impoſitions. They were for abrogating, or changing, the greateſt part of the laws of the land. They arraigned the juſtice of the realm; and diſdained the authority of the chriſtian magiſtrate.

Theſe, and many other dangerous doctrines, and enormous claims, they boldly taught, and peremptorily inſiſted upon; even threatening they ſhould prevail, in ſpight of the Queen and council, and all that oppoſed them: And they proved as good as their word. For they adhered ſo cloſely to their plan, that they perſevered in urging it, during the beſt part of three long reigns, for the ſpace of above eighty years; when at length they carried it into execution with a vengeance; and put it in practice, in the whole, and every part, attended with ſuch conſe-

ſequences, as are too well known, and too painful to relate [a].

Rapin's account of the principles of his friends, the *Preſbyterians*, is not much more favourable, than the foregoing one. But his character of their own offſpring, the *Independents*, is much worſe. He ſays, "Their principles were very proper "to put the kingdom in a flame, as they "did effectually. With regard to the "ſtate, they abhorred monarchy; and ap- "proved only of a republican govern- "ment. And as to religion, their prin- "ciples," he ſays, "were contrary to thoſe "of all the reſt of the world. They "were not only averſe to epiſcopacy; but "would not ſo much as endure ordinary "miniſters in the church. They main- "tained, every man might pray in pub- "lick, exhort his brethren, interpret the

[a] See *Strype's* Life of Archbiſhop *Whitgift*, Appendix to Book IV. N° iii; where what hath been here advanced may be ſeen more at large, in one view; with references to the writings of thoſe Puritans, from which the whole was extracted, by the author of *Foxes and Firebrands*.

"ſcrip-

" ſcriptures, according to the talents God " had endowed him with. It was the " particular intereſt of theſe men ſo to " manage, that the government of the " ſtate ſhould be changed, or rather over- " thrown; well knowing their party could " never ſubſiſt, but in anarchy [t]."

This

[t] The diſſenters now are moſtly *Independents*; but, I hope, are become more moderate in their principles. The laws that were made againſt them, in general, after the Reſtoration, *Rapin* acknowledges, were neceſſary to the church of *England*, for ſelf-preſervation; as they were always irreconcilable enemies to it; and their principles tended to the utter ruin of it; which they aimed at, in order to change it for their own diſcipline. And, unleſs they ſhew themſelves better diſpoſed towards it, it is humbly ſubmitted to the wiſdom of the legiſlature, whether it would not be ſtill proper to keep thoſe laws in force, by way of precaution, and *in terrorem?* Nor can they complain, that any other uſe hath been made of them; as, I believe, they cannot produce a ſingle inſtance of their having, in theſe times, been put in execution againſt them. See *Rapin ib. ad ann.* 1640, and 1644-5.

The reader may obſerve, that, throughout this treatiſe, the authors that are quoted, againſt the diſſenters, are generally ſuch as are of their own perſuaſion;

This retroſpect, I own, goes beyond the deſign of theſe papers: Nor ſhould it ever have appeared, had it not been in a manner extorted, by the panegyricks, which I ſee are now publiſhing, on the characters and merits of thoſe preſbyterian and independent divines, whoſe real principles are here briefly delineated—A publication, which can anſwer no end, but to irritate and enflame; and to revive grievances, which, on all hands, had been better buried in oblivion[n]. This plainly betrays a working of the old leven out anew; and ill accompanies any ſolicitations for farther indulgence, to a ſpirit, which forebodes no good uſe that is likely to be made of it, in caſe it ſhould be granted. I hope I may be excuſed, for ſtepping thus far out of my way; to animadvert upon a deſign, ſo contrary to that of theſe papers.

think favourably of them; or at leaſt are moderate churchmen. And that the authority of all high-church writers is ſtudiouſly avoided, unleſs recourſe is ſometimes had to it, for the proof of facts.

[n] See the Non-conformiſts memorial, now publiſhing in numbers.

To proceed. Nearly allied to the queſtion concerning the right of private judgement, is that relating to chriſtian liberty; or liberty of conſcience, as it is called: By which, I ſuppoſe, is meant, the liberty of following the dictates of conſcience, in all the outward acts of religious worſhip. For conſcience itſelf is very ſafe; nor can any force be put upon it, with regard to its inward feelings and ſenſations; which it is always at perfect liberty to attend to.

Mr. *Locke*, in the preface to his letters on toleration, hath theſe words— "Abſolute liberty, juſt and true liberty, "equal and impartial liberty, is the thing "which we ſtand in need of." This notion of liberty, entertained by ſo great a man, the author of the *Confeſſional*, and his followers, have not failed to avail themſelves of; and they have extended it much farther, I am perſuaded, than Mr. *Locke* ever intended. *Abſolute* liberty is not only romantick and enthuſiaſtical in the notion of it; but it is inconſiſtent

with thoſe other conditions, of its being *juſt* and *true*, *equal* and *impartial*; and would be even deſtructive of itſelf. For a ſtate of abſolute liberty would be a ſtate of anarchy and confuſion; in which every man would do what would be right in his own eyes, and would be making his own will law; the conſequence of which would be, that we ſhould have neither law, nor liberty. Every man would be encroaching on the liberty of his neighbour. The weak would become a prey to the ſtrong; and the many, ſlaves to a few; and thoſe the worſt among them. Even theſe would be ſlaves too—ſlaves to the greateſt tyrants of all others—to their own tyrannous luſts and paſſions. Inſomuch that, if mankind were indulged with liberty to the extent implied in the term *abſolute*, they could not contrive how they might be deprived of it more effectually. And, if there are any ſuch, whom nothing leſs than abſolute liberty will ſatisfy, they muſt go to ſeek it among the wild *Arabs*; for I am ſure they will not

not find it in any civilized nation upon earth.

Monſieur *Pufendorff* obſerves, "That "an *abſolute* liberty would be ſo far from "being uſeful, that it would indeed be "deſtructive to human nature; and that "therefore the binding and reſtraining it, "with laws, is highly conducive to the "good, and to the ſafety of mankind." And he obſerves farther, "That an abſo-"lute liberty, void of all impediment, "and of all defect, is applicable to God "alone; and is the nobleſt attribute of "his ſupreme eſſence—a perfection, not "only infinite in itſelf, but accompanied "too with infinite power [w]." And again, "Whoever," ſays he, "becomes a ci-"tizen, he reſigns up his natural liberty, "and ſubjects himſelf to a governing "power; which includes the right of life "and death; and at whoſe command he "muſt conſent to do many things, which "he greatly diſlikes, and abſtain from

[w] Pufendorff's Law of Nature and Nations, Ch. x.

"many things which he eagerly de-
"ſires [x]."

True and juſt liberty conſiſts in obedience to law, by which it ſhould ever be regulated, as *Cicero* very wiſely obſerves, *ſervi legum ergo ſumus, ut liberi eſſe poſſimus* [y]. And Mr. *Locke* himſelf elſewhere acknowledges, "That where there is no law,
"there is no freedom." This is far ſhort of *abſolute freedom*, in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word; which Mr. *Locke* could never mean it in: And therefore, as every author ought in candor to be interpreted by himſelf, he muſt be underſtood in a qualified ſenſe; but, being rather heated by his ſubject, when he was pleading for liberty, he let this unguarded expreſſion drop from him; and, under the authority of his name, it hath been carried to ſuch an extravagant height, as, I dare ſay, he never dreamt of.

[x] Qui civis fit, libertatis naturalis jacturam facit, et imperio ſe ſubjicit. Puf. de officio civis, lib. ii. cap. 5.

[y] Orat. pro Cluentio.

Chriſtian

Chriſtian liberty, as well as the right of private judgement, are privileges, which cannot be valued at too high a rate: But theſe are privileges which may be abuſed, by being carried to extremes in the uſe of them: And extremes in the beſt things are always the moſt pernicious. The unhappy diſſentions and diviſions, civil as well as religious, which prevail among us, are melancholy proofs of this great truth; there being no one cauſe, to which they may more juſtly be imputed, than to the abuſe of theſe privileges: And, if we do not think more ſoberly of ourſelves, in this reſpect, than we are at preſent wont to think; we may be convinced of our error, when perhaps it will be too late to receive any benefit from the conviction.

Poſſibly we may profit by examples drawn from former times. *Liberty of conſcience* was the cant word of *Oliver Cromwell*; which he pretended to be very zealous for. We are informed of him, "That "he headed the greateſt part of his army "with *Anabaptiſts*, *Antinomians*, *Seekers*,

" or *Separatiſts*, at beſt; and that he tied " them all together, by the point of *li-* " *berty of conſcience*; which was the com- " mon intereſt, wherein they all united." And, in defence of it, they contended, " That the civil magiſtrate had nothing " to do, in matters of religion, by con- " ſtraint, or reſtraint; but that every man " might, not only hold, and believe; but " preach, and do, in this reſpect, what he " pleaſed[z]."

The hiſtory of thoſe diſtracted times holds out a faithful mirrour to us; in which, if attentively peruſed, we cannot fail to trace our own likeneſs; and diſcover the ſame latitudinarian principles coming round again; which, if they grow upon us, we ſhall be as much bewildered by, as unſettled, as diſlocated, and as diſunited, as the ſectaries of thoſe days were; and likewiſe as looſe from all religious principle in reality, as they at laſt generally came to be.

[z] See *Calamy's* Life of *Baxter*, vol. I. p. 54. 90. 99. 110.

Conſcious

Conſcious however of the neceſſity of ſome band of union, at leaſt in appearance; ſubſcription to the ſcriptures alone is propoſed, as what would anſwer all the intents and purpoſes of ſubſcription whatſoever: Whereas it really would anſwer no other end, than that of an unlimited latitude, which alone is aimed at; ſo contrary to all union, and all the purpoſes of it.

For the experience of all ages may teach us, that the ſcriptures alone, though all things neceſſary and ſufficient to ſalvation are plainly taught in them, yet are not a ſufficient preſervative to themſelves, from being miſunderſtood, and wreſted, by thoſe *that are unlearned, and unſtable, unto their own deſtruction*[1]. This is what ſcripture itſelf informs us of. It is therefore the higheſt abſurdity to think, that a vague ſubſcription to theſe ſame ſcriptures ſhould be an effectual preſervative againſt all thoſe falſe doctrines, which have, age after age, been grafted upon them; and ſhould

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

alone

alone prove an adequate means of uniting us in the ſame judgement, concerning the great truths contained in them.

Hence the wiſdom of the church hath, in all ages, found it expedient and neceſſary, to guard and fence about them, with more explicit declarations of ſuch doctrines, as ſhe perceived were in danger of being perverted from their juſt and primitive ſenſe; eſpecially if they were ſome of the moſt fundamental ones, that were ſtruck at; and, by all the prudent means in her power, to be watchful over the ſacred truſt committed to her; and to keep the word of God from being *corrupted, and deceitfully dealt with*[b].

But ſuppoſing ſubſcription to the ſcriptures alone were to take place—ſuppoſing no other teſt were required, than a declaration, that a man was "a chriſtian and "a proteſtant; and that, as ſuch, he re- "ceived the revelation of the will of God, "contained in the ſcriptures of the Old "and New Teſtament, as the rule of his

[b] 2 Cor. ii. 17.—iv. 2.

"faith and practice," would all ſtand to this teſt? would this give univerſal ſatisfaction?

A conſiderable body of proteſtant diſſenters ſoon entered a *caveat* againſt this teſt; and prayed to parliament, that the petition for this requeſt might not be granted; alledging, among ſeveral other reaſons, "that a very great number of pro-"teſtant diſſenters, miniſters, and others, "would be diſſatisfied, if the intended al-"teration were to take place." And, with regard to thoſe that would be ſatisfied for the preſent, are they quite ſure, that all would continue long in the ſame mind?—That ſome farther alteration in the mode of ſubſcription would not be wanted?—Whether ſome would not be for refining upon it?—and for making ſome reſerves, ſome exceptions, and explanations of the ſenſe, in which they ſubſcribed, or declared? They now propoſe to ſubſcribe in a certain form of words, to be obſerved by all: Poſſibly, ſome may be found, who will

will not ſubſcribe in any words, but their own.

Dr. *Hartley* diſapproved of ſubſcribing to the ſcriptures at all. "It ſeems needleſs, or enſnaring," ſays he, "to ſubſcribe even to the ſcriptures themſelves. "If to any particular canon, or copy, &c. "enſnaring; becauſe of the many real "doubts in thoſe things. If not, it is quite "ſuperfluous, from the latitude allowed[c]." And I am really ſo far of his mind, that if we are to have no other ſubſcription, than ſuch a one to the ſcriptures, that may as well be let alone; and we may even be without any ſubſcription at all.

Many wiſh for a new tranſlation of the Bible: And ſome may ſcruple ſubſcribing till that is made. But who will enſure a general approbation of it, when it is made? One may be for ſubſcribing to this tranſlation, and another to that; and ſome, to no tranſlation, or verſion, at all, antient or modern: But may think it ſafeſt

[c] Eſſay on Man, vol. ii. p. 353.

to

to go to the fountain-head, and ſubſcribe to the ſcriptures in their original languages; which, to be ſure, they muſt all of courſe be well acquainted with. And ſtill there may be ſome, who will not reſt even here. One party may be for ſubſcribing to the original *Hebrew*; and be ſticklers for the *Hebrew* verity: While others may give the preference to the *Samaritan Pentateuch*. Some will chuſe to ſubſcribe to the *Alexandrian* copy: Some perhaps to the *Vatican*; and ſome to neither.

What editions of the original will they all agree to ſubſcribe to? Or, is it likely they would come to an agreement about any? It is well known there are many various readings in the ſeveral MSS. of the *Greek Teſtament:* And many likewiſe have of late been diſcovered in the *Hebrew* MSS. of the *Old Teſtament*. Who will undertake to furniſh the clue, that ſhall lead us through all this labyrinth! And how many, in the uſe of their own private judgement each, would invariably follow

follow him throughout? When perſons are ſeized with ſuch a ſpirit of refinement, there is no gueſſing how far it will carry them. Their delicacy is offended at the thoughts of *human* articles, and formularies, and *human* interpretations of ſcripture. This others, perhaps, would be apt to call great arrogance, perverſeneſs, and ſelf-ſufficiency. Can they ſhew us any angelick articles? or direct us to any divine interpretations of the ſcriptures; beſides what is contained in the ſcriptures themſelves?

But while they live among men, they muſt ſubmit to the common laws of humanity; ſomething of which will ſtick to them, in ſpite of all they can do to diveſt themſelves of it: And they muſt go out of the world, to be quite free from the impertinence of other people, every now and then interpoſing itſelf. The ſcriptures were written by men, though dictated by the Spirit of God; and were conveyed down to us by the channel of frail mortals: Nor can they be received, but through the unhallowed hands of fallible creatures,

creatures; whatever defilements they may be thought to have contracted from them.

I have read of a man, who would not brook the approach of any human inventions to the worſhip, or word of God. This made him cut out of his Bible the contents of the chapters; and the running-titles of the leaves; and thus he reduced it to the bare text, diveſted of binding and cover; though yet he could not, for the life of him, contrive how to diſcharge it of the paper, on which, nor of the ink, with which, it was printed. And this ſame angelick man purſued the principle of ſeparation ſo far, that at length he withdrew from all ſociety with men, leſt he ſhould communicate with them in their ſins. And in this condition he continued, till his children lay dead in the houſe about him; and he became utterly unable to help himſelf[d].

[d] Biſhop *Stillingfleet's* ſermon on Phil. iii. 16. From *Ball* againſt *Can.*

What

What now is to be done? We hence plainly ſee the neceſſity of ſome *medium*—ſome line to be drawn. I could give ſuch refiners a hint to this purpoſe, if they could help me to get over one objection: And that is, To take their Bibles as they find them. This might ſerve their turn to all intents and purpoſes; were it not, that the church here interferes again; under whoſe authority they muſt receive them by tradition, through the ſeveral ages of her exiſtence; as ſhe aſſumes to be "the keeper, and wit-"neſs, of holy writ." And this unluckily makes one, in part, of her *Thirty-nine articles.*

This however is the caſe: For as the oracles of God, in the Old Teſtament, were committed unto the *Jewiſh* church; ſo are the divine oracles of both Old, and New, committed to the care of the Chriſtian church: Whence ſhe is properly ſtiled, *The pillar and ground*, or, as it is in the *margin*, the ſtay, *of the truth*[e].

[e] 1 Tim. iii. 15.

This

This privilege, and this authority, is aſcribed to the church, and maintained by *Calvin* himſelf; for which take his own words.—"The Lord, ſaith he, ſo re-"commendeth the authority of his church, "that when it is violated, he reckons his "own to be diminiſhed. Neither is it of "ſmall importance, that the church is "called, *The pillar, and ſtay, of the truth*; "*and the houſe of God*: By which words "*Paul* ſignifieth, that to the end the truth "of God ſhould not fail in the world, the "church is a faithful keeper of it; becauſe "God's will was to have the preaching "of his word kept pure, by her miniſtry, "and labour; and ſo to approve himſelf "to us as the Father of his houſehold, "while he thus feedeth us with ſpiritual "nouriſhments; and procureth all things "that make for our ſalvation[f]."

In

[f] Sic ejus (eccleſiæ) authoritatem commendat (Dominus) ut dum illa violatur, ſui ipſius imminutam cenſeat. Neque enim parvi momenti eſt, quod vocatur columna, et firmamentum veritatis, et domus Dei. Quibus verbis ſignificat *Paulus*, ne intercidat veritas Dei in

 mundo,

In a word, ſubſcription to the ſcriptures, in the looſe and general terms that are propoſed, anſwers no other end than to profeſs, we are not heathens, nor *Mahometans*; but that we are chriſtians of ſome denomination, or other.

Nor would a declaration that we are proteſtants, much mend the matter. This hath been ſpoken to already [s]. I ſhall only add here, that we cannot make a more acceptable compliment to the church of *Rome*, nor to the enemies of our common chriſtianity, than to wave ſubſcription to our articles. *If we take away the hedge of the Lord's vineyard, and break down the wall thereof; it will be laid waſte, and trodden down. The boar out of the wood will waſte it; and the wild beaſt of the field will*

mundo, eccleſiam eſſe fidem ejus cuſtodem: Quia ejus miniſterio et operâ, voluit Deus puram verbi ſui prædicationem conſervari; et ſe nobis oſtendere patrem familiâs, cum nos ſpiritualibus alimentis paſcit; et quæcunque ad ſalutem noſtram faciunt, procurat. Calv. Inſtit. lib. iv. cap. i. ſect. 10.

[s] P. 69.

devour it. It will be open to the incurſions of all invaders; and we ſhall have no ſecurity againſt falſe teachers of any kind.

Upon the whole, our ſafety lies in our union; nor can the church of Chriſt ever flouriſh, or proſper, while it is torn by diviſions. Schiſms in the church are no leſs dangerous, than factions in the ſtate; and concord and unanimity are the firmeſt bonds of ſociety in both.

The heathen ſoldiers thought it a pity to rend the ſeamleſs coat of Chriſt: And do his own diſciples feel no remorſe in offering that violence, not to his garment, but to his body, the church, of which they are members?

In former times, good men, on both ſides, not only lamented our diviſions, and wiſhed our breaches might be made up; but they uſed all their endeavours for that purpoſe. No leſs than five or ſix attempts were made in the laſt century, to remove the ſcruples of our diſſenting brethren, to reconcile them to the church, and to bring about a comprehenſion. How they all,

and the laſt eſpecially, which was far proceeded in, came to miſcarry, is to no purpoſe now to enquire; and perhaps might be invidious to relate.

The ill ſucceſs of theſe endeavours diſcouraged all future hopes of a comprehenſion; and the number of ſects having rather been increaſed, than diminiſhed, ſince the revolution, ſeems to have rendered ſuch a deſign leſs practicable. The toleration then granted is looked upon as a ſanction to them, which gives them a kind of eſtabliſhment.

Indeed men ſeem to have loſt all ſight of a reconciliation of our religious differences; and the late ſtruggles which have been made to throw off all connection with the national church, without any firm bond of union among the authors of them, too plainly ſhews, what ſpirit they are of; and that they are more diſpoſed to fly from, than to draw towards, any one common centre: Whereby they become *enemies to the croſs of Chriſt*, and militate againſt chriſtianity itſelf.

Perhaps

Perhaps we are all too much to blame in this reſpect; and have all been too inattentive to the cultivation of that truly chriſtian temper, which conciliates, and unites thoſe that are poſſeſſed of it, to each other.

This however is certain, that we all have many great and national offences to anſwer for: And that it is *for the ſins of our prophets, and the iniquities of our prieſts*; as well as for the manifold tranſgreſſions of the people of this land in general, which are grown to ſuch an enormous height, that *the anger of the Lord hath divided us* [h]; and hath ſuffered the ſpirit of diſcord to go forth, and prevail to ſuch an alarming degree, that it is high time we ſhould humble ourſelves under the mighty hand of God; and betake ourſelves to appeaſe his wrath, by a national repentance and reformation; in order to prevent the infliction of ſeverer judgements. If we agree in nothing elſe, we ſhould agree in

[h] Lam. iv. 13. 16.

this: And that may in time diſpoſe us to be like-minded in other reſpects.

As this great calamity is to be imputed to our ſins in general, it concerns us all to enquire into the more immediate ſources of it; not with a view of accuſing, and recriminating againſt, each other; but that every party, and every individual, may all call themſelves to a ſtrict account, wherein, and how far, they have ſeverally contributed to our diviſions—Whether they have taken an active part in them; or have encouraged, provoked, fomented, countenanced, or even connived at them? And whether, upon the ſevereſt ſcrutiny, we either can acquit, or muſt condemn, ourſelves, of having been any way inſtrumental, in promoting, or continuing of our unhappy differences and diviſions, we ſhould all bear in our minds a deep ſenſe of the miſchiefs of ſeparation; and endeavour, by all the means in our power, to guard againſt, and overcome them. We ſhould recollect, that diſcord is an evil,

pregnant

pregnant with many evil conſequences; and that neither the church of Chriſt in general, nor any particular branch of it, can proſper where it prevails.

As the beſt means of ſubduing it, we ſhould all embrace *catholick and uniting principles*; which, if duly implanted, and cultivated in our minds, will operate, with a magnetick force, to attract us towards each other: I ſay, *catholick* and *uniting*; and I join thoſe two terms together, becauſe they are inſeparable in their natures; and neither can be effectual, or complete without the other.

Univerſal benevolence is the acknowledged duty of all chriſtians; and ought certainly to be extended to all thoſe who differ from us in religious ſentiment. This all muſt allow. And therefore it is common to hear men make great profeſſions of charity, towards thoſe they cannot agree with in this reſpect. But where intereſts claſh, charity too often ſuffers; and a ſlender acquaintance with human nature may convince us, that in a matter of ſo

intereſting a concern, as religion, our reſentment, againſt ſuch as differ from us in it, generally riſes in proportion to our zeal for it. Hence men will hardly be brought to any true, and cordial affection towards each other, when there are conſiderable differences in their religious principles, opinions, modes of worſhip, and diſcipline. It is next to impoſſible, ſo heterogeneous a mixture ſhould be brought to incorporate. But uniformity of worſhip naturally promotes unity of ſentiment; and unity of ſentiment, unity of affection.

On the other hand, if our charity be ſincere, and truly chriſtian, it will warm our hearts towards each other; and will draw us together *with the cords of a man*, with the bands of love. It will diſpoſe us to *a fellowſhip of ſpirit*; and by degrees will bring us *to ſpeak the ſame things*; to profeſs the ſame doctrines; and to be joined together in the ſame judgement, belief, and principle. But if men are ſhy, and ſuſpicious, and keep aloof from each other—If they are ſtiff, and uncomplying,

and

and are more diſpoſed to widen our breaches, than to cloſe them; let them profeſs what they will, they ſhew, that a private, party ſpirit ſtill prevails; and that is not the ſpirit of the Goſpel.

Great profeſſions of charity are often met with, in the writings of the weaker party: But if they are not accompanied with ſome more ſubſtantial proofs than words; they give room to ſuſpect, they are meant only to keep fair with thoſe in power.

It would become all—It would be the praiſe of all parties, to turn their eyes, with a more favourable aſpect, towards each other; and to conſider, whether there be not a poſſibility, if not of reconciling our differences, yet of approaching nearer to each other—To that end, let not the one wait, in expectation of the other's moving firſt; but let there be a laudable emulation for the lead in this reſpect.

It is therefore humbly ſubmitted to our governors in church and ſtate, whether it would

would be at all beneath—whether it would not be worthy the dignity, and ſuitable to the known moderation, of the church of *England*, to make the firſt advance?

And ſurely all thoſe ſeveral bodies of proteſtants, which ſeparate from her, would be moved by the example, to take ſome ſteps to meet the national church; if they would not even contend, who ſhould appear foremoſt in ſo good a cauſe; each being aſhamed to be left behind.

As a proof of their good diſpoſitions in this reſpect, they will moderate the ſtile of their writings: ſoften all acrimony of expreſſion; avoid and diſcourage all inflammatory and ſeditious diſcourſes, and publications; and in their whole conduct, *follow after the things that make for peace.*

They will conſider, that not only in their ſeparate capacities each, but that all in their joint capacities likewiſe, are inferior in number to the church of *England*; and form the leſſer body in general: And that, as in natural and political bodies, the lighter is outweighed by the heavier,

and

and attracted by it; and the weaker gives way to the ſtronger; ſo in the religious world, in this reſpect, the leſſer body of chriſtians ſhould yield to the greater, ſubmit to the laws of attraction, and ſuffer themſelves to be drawn by the greater force, and united to it; provided the differences between them ſhould prove to be not quite unſurmountable; and might be reduced within ſuch a compaſs as to afford the proſpect of a reconciliation: Becauſe it is a firſt principle in ſociety, as obſerved already, that the inclinations of the minority be over-ruled by the judgement and deciſion of the ſuperior number. And indeed it is no more than the chriſtian law of unity requires, that they ſhould conform, as far they can; without putting a force upon their own conſciences; and that in leſſer matters, and matters otherwiſe of indifference at leaſt, they ſhould yield ſo far, as they are indifferent; make ſome compliances and conceſſions; and offer ſome cheap ſacrifices, that would coſt them little, or nothing.

And

And would God, they would reflect, that matters of *indifference* make no inconſiderable part of the *differences* between us!

For theſe reaſons, our diſſenting brethren will not ſcruple to agree, in making the church of *England* the *baſis* and centre of an union, or comprehenſion. The author of *The rights of the chriſtian church*, ſeems to apprehend, that the uniting of chriſtians under any one external head, or form of government, as the centre of catholick union and communion, muſt inevitably terminate in a *Popedom*. But as long as the church of *England* is dependent upon the ſtate, all ſuch apprehenſions are as groundleſs, as, in this writer, they were affected.

The apoſtle's rule, in the caſe before us, merits our moſt ſerious attention. *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the ſame rule: Let us mind the ſame thing*[i]. As far as we have hitherto attained, or poſſibly can attain unto; or advance towards each other, let us ſtrive

[i] Phil. iii. 16.

to accompany one another, walk together, and bring our ſentiments, as nearly as we can, to concur with each other. And if there be ſtill ſome ſcruples which we cannot overcome, or ſome doubts and difficulties, which we are not able to get over—if in any ſuch things as theſe, we ſtill continue to be *otherwiſe minded*, God, when he ſees the good diſpoſitions of our hearts, ſhall, in his due time, *reveal even this unto us* [k].

Now ſuppoſing an attempt to bring about a comprehenſion were determined upon; the firſt thing that ſeems to preſent itſelf is, *a reviſal of our articles and liturgy*; in whatever manner the wiſdom of our governors in church and ſtate may think fit. And it is the heart's deſire of many good, and very reſpectable perſons; and many of the firmeſt friends of the church of *England*, both among the clergy and laity, that this work ſhould be ſet about; and that ſuch alterations may be made in both, as would remove all real objections, and

[k] Phil. ver. 15.

give

give all reaſonable ſatisfaction to thoſe that are without, as well as within, the church.

The articles might undergo a particular ſcrutiny; and be reduced to the touchſtone of ſcripture, one by one. The moſt fundamental ones, and thoſe againſt popery, I take it for granted, would, for ſubſtance, be retained: And the ſpeculative articles, with ſuch others, as are of leſs conſequence, might be omitted, or altered, as would be judged moſt proper: And ſome reſpecting the preſent times might perhaps be inſerted in their ſtead. But that, upon the whole, the number of them ſhould be rather reduced, than added to; that *no greater burden be laid* upon ſubſcribers, than what conſiſts of *neceſſary things*; according to the apoſtolical rule[1].

As no human compoſition is ſo perfect, as not to be capable of improvement; and as there is no antient compoſition in our language, but what muſt ſuffer particu-

[1] Acts xv. 28.

larly,

larly, by the mutation and flux of it; and though perhaps nothing hath contributed more to the preſervation of the *Engliſh* language, than the conſtant uſe of our liturgy, and of the ſcriptures, in the vulgar tongue; yet, I preſume, no one now doubts, but that the liturgy may be improved; by the change of obſolete words, phraſes, and cuſtoms—by ſome more ſubſtantial alterations in its ſervice—by the addition, perhaps, of ſome occaſional offices—and by the better adjuſting of ſome circumſtantials of external order.

And I flatter myſelf that when the trial comes to be made, there will not be much need of improvement found, beſides in circumſtantials. Our church is ſound in its conſtitution; and I truſt feels no decay in its integral parts, that wants much, if any, repair. But if whatever improvements it is capable of, in doctrine, diſcipline, and worſhip, were made in it, conſiſtently with the fundamentals of chriſtianity, and the principles on which

it

it is eſtabliſhed [m]; the benefits would be manifold, and ineſtimable.

This would enlarge the borders of our church—would conciliate ſome to her—would ſilence others; and give no juſt cauſe of offence to any. It would, at the ſame time, be highly beneficial to ourſelves. It would be the means of our greater edification, and would render our liturgy ſtill the more *reaſonable ſervice*. It would demonſtrate our candor and ingenuity—would teſtify our charity, and deſire to embrace all thoſe that ſeparate from us. It would juſtify our conduct to the world: It would be an additional recommendation of our church, to all other proteſtant churches; and, if brought to a

[m] *Tertullian* lays down an excellent rule in this reſpect. Regula quidem fidei una omnino eſt, ſola immobilis, et irreformabilis, credendi ſcilicet in unicum Deum—et filium ejus Jeſum Chriſtum—Hâc lege fidei manente, cætera jam diſciplinæ, et converſationis, admittunt novitatem correctionis, operante ſcilicet, et proficiente uſque ad finem gratiâ Dei.

Tertull. de virg. velandis, cap. 1.

happy

happy concluſion, would be the glory of the preſent reign.

As chriſtians, in their private capacities, ought always to be going on unto perfection; ſo ought they, in their publick and aggregate capacity, the church, likewiſe.

"It is the glory of our *Engliſh church*," ſays one of her learned divines, "and "what ſhe often boaſts of, that ſhe is the "*neareſt* of any now in the chriſtian "world, to the primitive model. It is "not, I preſume, denied, that ſhe might "be *nearer* ſtill: And if her glory be "great, for being ſo *near*; it would cer-"tainly be greater, if ſhe were yet "*nearer*[n]."

In purſuance of this noble deſign, I beg leave to hint at one or two improvements more in our church; which ſome time or other, it may be preſumed, will take place.

[n] Dr. *Marſhal's* preface to his tranſlation of St. *Cyprian*, p. 12.

Though our *Engliſh* tranſlation of the Bible is an excellent one; and, in the judgement of a very learned man, the beſt in the world[o]; yet it is thought to have its imperfections; and a new tranſlation hath been long wiſhed for, as one of our greateſt *deſiderata*. The diſtribution of this undertaking among ſeveral able hands, in like manner with that, in which the laſt tranſlation, made by authority, was executed, would render this great work the more eaſy, expeditious, and accurate: And the original languages of holy writ having of late been much ſtudied; it cannot be ſaid we are in want of perſons duly qualified for the taſk.

An excellent body of laws[p] was drawn up, for the uſe of our church, at the beginning of the Reformation; but, unhappily, it could never obtain the ſanction of publick authority; and it hath ever ſince lain dormant, as a dead letter. If the times would bear, that theſe laws, and our

[o] Mr. *Selden*, in his Table Talk.

[p] Reformatio legum eccleſiaſticarum.

canons too, might be reviſed, and enforced by the authority of the legiſlature; nothing would be more deſirable, if any thing more could be deſired, for the improvement of our diſcipline.

Biſhop *Burnet* hints, that the Reformation was not carried on to the perfection, that was deſigned, and wiſhed for; and he exhorts us to wait, and pray for ſuch a glorious conjuncture, as may reſtore every thing among us to a primitive purity and ſplendor[q]. We have waited long; and I doubt we have long to wait ſtill, before the whole of ſo large a deſign be carried into execution. However, we may do ſomething towards it—ſomething might be attempted towards making a beginning. We at leaſt may, and ought to make it the ſubject of our conſtant, and fervent prayers: Nor do I ſee, that the preſent conjuncture is ſo unfavourable for it, as many, I doubt, apprehend it to be. The prejudices of ſome churchmen, to which the miſcarriage of a comprehenſion,

[q] Concluſion of his Hiſtory of the Reformation.

deſigned in 1689, hath been chiefly imputed, are now entirely worn away. We may learn wiſdom from the hiſtory of it. The proceedings in that deſign are known to be extant; and recourſe, I preſume, may be had to them. They may ſerve as a good ground-work to build upon: And the voice of the publick calls for the tryal. And if it be ſet about in good earneſt, our church, under the divine *auſpices*, may be brought to a reſemblance of the purity and ſimplicity of the primitive church; and our *Zion* may become the *joy of the whole earth.* It may by degrees draw near to that perfect ſtate, which we have grounds to hope the univerſal church will at length arrive at; when Chriſt, her ſpouſe, ſhall *preſent her to himſelf a glorious church, not having ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing; being holy, and without blemiſh.*

To conclude. We have ſeen, that there is ſuch a thing, as to be perfectly joined together, *in the ſame mind, and in the ſame judgement*; otherwiſe, we would not be exhorted to it. We would not be ſo much

intreated

intreated, and preſſed, to endeavour at what is impoſſible to be attained; nor encouraged to hope for ſuch happineſs, as is never to be acquired.

Such divines therefore muſt ſurely have but ill learned Chriſt, or muſt have loſt all ſight of his precepts, who pronounce "any "attempt towards avoiding diverſity of "opinion to be not only an *uſeleſs*, but an "*impracticable* ſcheme[r]." What! are our religious *differences* ſuch *indifferent* things, that it is immaterial what our opinions are? Is it of no uſe to avoid, or prevent, perſecutions, and maſſacres, which have often been the conſequences of them? And is the peace and harmony of the Chriſtian world not worth preſerving? And to pronounce that to be impracticable, which God, in his holy word, hath enjoined, and declared to be attainable, is ſtrange divinity indeed.

However diſcouraging the proſpect may be at preſent, we are aſſured, by the higheſt authority, and by the certainty of

[r] Confeſſional, p. 2.

fact, that a perfect harmony once reigned in the church of Chriſt. The firſt diſciples were *all of one heart, and one ſoul*: And we have good grounds to hope, that the ſame bleſſed temper ſhall again prevail among Chriſtians. The prophet *Ezekiel* foretels, that the *two ſticks*, of *Judah* and *Joſeph*, ſhall in the end be joined together, and *become one*; and the whole houſe of *Iſrael* be *one nation*—that they *all ſhall have one ſhepherd*; and that *one king ſhall be king over them all*[s].

And to prevent all doubt, whether this concerns the chriſtian church, our Saviour himſelf aſſures us, that it likewiſe in the end ſhall conſiſt of *one fold, and one ſhepherd*[t]. Not to cite any other predictions, and prophetical intimations of the ſame bleſſed event.

We have good grounds therefore to hope, that the time will come, when we of this nation, notwithſtanding preſent appearances, ſhall have our breaches repaired, and become *one fold* likewiſe, and

[s] Ezek. xxxvii. 15—24. [t] John x. 16.

be

be gathered into one body, under the good ſhepherd of our ſouls; who gave his life for the ſheep, that he might unite them to himſelf, and to each other. We will therefore beware of defeating the end of his death by our diviſions.

Our Lord repreſents his church under the lively emblem of a *vine*, of which he reckons himſelf to be the root; and the members of it as the branches; which therefore can have no life, but what they draw from him. He teaches them, that, by their abiding in him, they bear fruit, and flouriſh; but, if they abide not in him, he moſt aſſuredly warns them of their wretched fate; which can be none other, than to be rejected, as withered branches; which are fit for nothing, but to be *caſt into the fire, and burned*[u].

We have ſeen, that our Saviour conſiders us all, as one body, and himſelf, as the head of it. What a grievous thing is it, for the members to raiſe a mutiny in this body! How muſt they all ſuffer by it!

[u] John xvi. 1—6.

And how dreadful the conſequence in the end, if continued in! How neceſſary therefore is it to our mutual preſervation, that it be appeaſed!

The apoſtle intreats us, to uſe all our endeavours *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; and enforces his advice with various arguments, to the ſame purpoſe. Shall we be deaf to them all? Nor ſuffer them to have any weight with us? We have ſeen, that by unity in the faith it is, that the body of Chriſt is to be edified. By diſunion then it muſt be deſtroyed.

This great principle of unity is the chief cement, by which this his whole body is fitly and cloſely compacted together, diffuſing itſelf, and efficaciouſly pervading every part; promoting the increaſe and edification of the whole, in love. Surely, it is very unnatural to aim at diſſolving this cement, ſo eſſential to our own ſubſiſtence—to offer at untying, much more at cutting, this ſacred knot, in which

all

all our ſtrength lieth. On the contrary, we ſhould think it incumbent upon us—we ſhould think it our mutual intereſt, one and all, to conſpire, in drawing it cloſer, if we poſſibly can—in improving, and in the end, perfecting ourſelves in love: By which means, we ſhall attain unto the original ſtandard of our nature—*unto the full meaſure, and ſtature of Chriſt.*

Therefore, *If there be any conſolation in Chriſt—If any comfort of love—If any fellowſhip of the Spirit—If any bowels and mercies; fulfill ye our* common *joy; that ye be like-minded, having the ſame love, being of one accord, of one mind*[w]. *And put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, forbearing one another. And, above all things, put on charity; which is the bond of perfectneſs; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts; to which alſo ye are called in one body*[x].

[w] Phil. ii. 1, 2.
[x] Col. iii. 12—15.

And

And the God of patience and conſolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus: That ye may, with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt[y], Amen.

I cannot better cloſe theſe papers, than with the following prayer, taken out of our excellent liturgy; which deſerves to be oftener uſed in our publick worſhip.

" O God, the Father of our Lord Jeſus " Chriſt, our only Saviour, the Prince of " Peace! give us grace ſeriouſly to lay to " heart the great dangers we are in, by " our unhappy diviſions. Take away all " hatred and prejudice, and whatſoever " elſe may hinder us from godly union, " and concord: That, as there is but one " body; and one Spirit; and one hope " of our calling; one Lord; one faith; " one baptiſm; one God and Father of " us all: So we may henceforth be all " of one heart, and of one ſoul; united " in one holy bond, of truth and peace,

[y] Rom. xv. 5, 6.

" of

" of faith and charity; and may with
" one mind, and one mouth, glorify
" thee, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.
" Amen[z]."

[z] From the Office for the King's Acceſſion to the Throne.

The END.

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